CHINESE LITERATURE

Monthly 11 1964

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Wu Yu-hsiao

Young Folk in a Remote Region

CHARACTERS

Sadik, 28, a Uighur
Amina, 23, a Uighur
Eli, 28, a Uighur
Wu Chun, 45, a Han
Maira, 22, a Kazakh
Kasen, 27, a Kazakh
Aman, 20, a Hui
Kasymbek, 49, a Kazakh
Kaisha, 45, Kasymbek's wife
Bebesh, 17, Kasymbek's daughter
Kambar, 45, a Kazakh
Kulysh, 40, Kambar's wife
Bukara, 35, a Kazakh
Three herdsmen

Wu Yu-hsiao, born in Hsiahsien County, Shensi Province in 1927, was formerly an actor. After liberation he wrote and directed plays for the Modern Drama Company of Kansu Province.

ACT 1

The herdsmen's quarters. Flower-beds and a green lawn are flanked by a new two-roomed log-cabin with glass windows. In the courtyard stands a solid rectangular table with stools around it. At the back is a small railed bridge, and behind the fence round the lawn is the gate of the cow-shed. A lantern hangs from its eaves. There are wooden seats by the gate, a row of gleaming milk pails along the wall, green pine saplings around the yard. Behind rise the glistening snowy peaks of Tienshan.

It is dawn. A chilly mist is scattering. Bright clouds gleam in the sky, larks are singing. A horse can be heard galloping up from the distance. Someone is singing a rousing song.

The gate of the cow-shed opens and Bebesh comes out carrying a wooden bucket. She looks towards the sound of the singing while pouring milk into the pails. The horse draws nearer.

Bukara (*offstage*): Hey, lass! Is your director here?
Bebesh: No, he's away.

(*The sound of galloping stops. Enter Bukara in haste, carrying a whip.*)

Bukara (*leaning over the fence*): Well, Bebesh, how are you?
Bebesh: I'm fine. How are you, brigade leader?
Bukara: Where has your chief gone? I have important business.
Bebesh: You want to buy horses?
Bukara: That's right.
Bebesh: What does your commune want them for? To pull carts?
Bukara: To pull carts, thresh and plough the wheat fields.
Bebesh: It's too bad our horses are in quarantine.
Bukara: Why?
Bebesh: Quite a few are sick.
Bukara (*surprised*): Oh? What's the trouble?
Bebesh: I don't know. It's supposed to be very serious. They may die of it.
Bukara (*shocked*): That's a bad business. Can't your vets cure them?
Bebesh: They haven't been able to.
Bukara: Where's your crack vet, Comrade Sadik?
Bebesh: Sadik.... He's gone to the Ining hospital.
Bukara: What? Is Comrade Sadik in hospital?
Bebesh: Yes.
Bukara: What's wrong with him?

Bebesh (*shaking her head*): I don't know.
Bukara: Do you know when he'll be out?
Bebesh (*shaking her head*): No.
Bukara: But hasn't your farm any other vets?
Bebesh: I heard dad say some will be sent from Urumchi.
Bukara (*cheerfully*): That's all right then. We've got to buy horses. I'll go and look for your chief. Goodbye. (*He turns and rides away.*)
Kambar (*offstage*): Bebesh, Bebesh! (*He enters with his whip.*) Is your dad in?
Bebesh: Yes. (*She turns to the right room.*) Dad!

(*The door on the right opens and out comes Kasymbek. He has medals on his chest and is busily making a halter.*)

Kasymbek: Well?
Kambar: Listen! The vets sent by the district have arrived. Two are for our team. Now....
Kasymbek: So they've come, eh? Bebesh, ask your mother to make some tea.
Bebesh: Right. (*She puts down the bucket and goes into the right room.*)
Kambar (*to the room on the left*): Kulysh! Get some sour milk.
Kulysh (*offstage*): Right.
Kambar: Where are they to live, brigade leader?... One's a man, the other's a girl.
Kasymbek: The man can stay in my outer room.
Kambar: Then the girl can stay in my outer room. Kulysh, get that room ready.
Kasymbek: Wait a bit. What sort of cadres are they? Kazakh, Han or Hui?
Kambar: They're Uighurs.
Kasymbek: Uighurs, eh?
Kambar: Yes. University graduates.
Kasymbek: Oho, two literary blokes.
Kambar: Yes, they're young but they've knowledge, and knowledge is the key to wisdom....
Kasymbek (*interrupting*): And wisdom can overturn mountains. But we must see what they're like. Not all pigeons can fly high, not all ducks can swim far. I know what, Kambar. When they show up, ask them a few questions to see if they really

understand horses and are keen on their work. If they're not, don't let them treat the horses. Send them with the women to cut grass. Here they are. You sound them out. (*He re-enters the room.*)

Kambar: Sound them out? I? (*He goes in after Kasymbek.*)

(*Silence. Horses are leaving the stables. There is singing near by. Amina and Eli carrying bedding rolls and suitcases appear on the bridge. A herdsman is singing lustily.*)

Amina (*excitedly pushing back her scarf*): Oh my! Do look, Eli, at those slopes covered with green pines and the clear mountain stream. There are herdsmen's tents everywhere, far and near. See the smoke wreathing up....

Eli: Horses everywhere.

Amina: White, grey, brown and roan ones....

Eli: They are like bright morning clouds.

Amina: Like flowers in bloom.

Eli: Yes, like flowers in bloom.

Amina: Look at those colts, chasing wild ducks by the lake.

Eli: Yes, so they are.

Amina: Isn't it beautiful, Eli! Those lovely horses remind me of that poem by Abai.*

Eli (*reciting*): Short necks, lean cheeks, muzzles like antelopes,
They look up and flick their tails like rippling waves.

Kambar (*coming out of the room*): Ah, the cadres are here.

Amina and **Eli** (*politely placing their right hands on their chests*): How are you, uncle?

Kambar (*returning the salute*): Salaam. Welcome, friends. Sit down, sit down.

(*Kaisha comes out with a teapot and bowls. Kulysh brings out bowls of sour milk and small wooden spoons.*)

Amina and **Eli** (*saluting them*): Salaam!

Kaisha and **Kulysh** (*nodding*): Salaam.

Kaisha: Do sit down and have some tea. (*She goes inside.*)

Kulysh: Try our sour milk. It's not very good.

Amina and **Eli** (*offering to shake hands*): Thank you, auntie.

*A well-known classical Kazakh writer.

Kulysh (*too modest to shake hands*): Ah. (*She goes through the side door.*)

Kambar: It's good of you to come. Are you both here to vet the horses?

Amina and **Eli** (*nodding*): Yes.

Kambar: Have you met Director Wu?

Eli: Not yet.

Amina: We heard he'd gone to a meeting in the agricultural brigade.

Kambar: When he comes back he's sure to come and see you. (*Pause.*) Have some tea.

(*Kasymbek opens the door a crack and listens carefully, a cigarette in his mouth.*)

Kambar: Do you both like horses?

Amina: Yes.

Eli: I should say so. We studied stock-breeding.

Kambar: Then you must know the good points of our Ili horses?

Amina: Why, Ili horses are famed all over the country.

Eli: (*continuing*): They're docile, handsome, able to stand extremes of heat and cold, and very strong....

Kambar (*excitedly*): Stronger than camels!

Eli: Large hooves, short necks....

Kambar: With eyes like silver bells. Hooves like iron pans.

(*Amina and Eli exchange smiles.*)

Kambar: But, young folk, the horses in our brigade are all the Orlov type.

Amina (*pleased*): Orlovs are fine horses, uncle. They're ideal. With their good muscles and strong bones, you can't beat them when it comes to pulling ploughs, combines or carts. They're world famous.

Kasymbek (*stepping out, satisfied*): Right. Well said, young folk.

Kambar: Let me introduce you. This is our old brigade leader Kasymbek. He specializes in breeding Orlov horses. He's a labour hero who's been to Peking and seen Chairman Mao.

Amina and **Eli** (*standing up respectfully to greet him*): Salaam!

Kasymbek (*returning their greeting*): Sit down. (*Candidly*) I want to speak to you frankly. You young people from the cities are good talkers with honey on your tongues and voices like copper bells when you sing. But this isn't enough. You must put

all your minds and energies into your job. Only then will you amount to anything and become experts. Understand?

Amina and **Eli** (*respectfully*): Yes, we understand.

Eli: We've come down to get practical experience.

Kasymbek (*cutting bread*): Then study hard. There's a lot to horse-breeding. (*He warms to the subject. To Bebesh*) Bring the sausage, quick. We Kazakhs have a saying: A candle can only light up a tent, but knowledge can light up the world. If you want to learn, take a leaf out of young Sadik's book.

Amina (*surprised*): Sadik?

Kasymbek: Yes, Sadik. (*He presses them to eat.*)

(*Amina and Eli sip tea and listen intently.*)

Kasymbek: First thing that fellow did when he arrived was to go up the mountains and stay there with the horses, rushing round with them day and night, in wind, rain or snow, and searching everywhere for people to teach him. He's known in every team, his horse has left hoofprints on every hill — even in places where no bird or beast will venture. Our chief went up to give him some ideas and help him do research. He learned his skill the hard way, young Sadik, from the herdsmen. If you want to learn, copy him.

Amina (*eagerly*): Where does Sadik come from, uncle?

Kambar: From Ining.

Amina (*to herself*): So it's him.... Where is he now?

Kambar: In hospital in Ining.

Amina (*concerned*): In hospital? Why?

Kasymbek (*putting the halter over his shoulder*): Why? Because he wants to wipe out intussusception which has crept in among our horses like a horse-thief. But before he succeeded in doing it, he got infected with anthrax.

Amina (*shocked*): What! Infected with anthrax, uncle?

Kasymbek (*sadly*): Yes. But I shouldn't be telling you these things when you've only just arrived. He'll get over it and come back. A mountain eagle doesn't leave its eyrie. All right, you must rest. Kambar, let's exercise the horses. (*Exit.*)

Bebesh (*weeps*).....

Eli: Oh ... why is that girl crying?

Kambar: Because Sadik is her teacher. Whenever he came down from the mountains he used to stay in their outer room and teach her characters or tell her how to care for horses. The girl's upset because she's afraid her teacher may not recover. Don't worry, Bebesh. He'll get better and then he'll come back. Hurry up and milk the cows.

Bebesh: Yes. (*She puts down her plate and takes a bucket to the shack by the cow-shed.*)

Kambar: Well, now, you sit here and have your tea. You can stay there for the time being, lass (*pointing to the room on the left*). And you can doss there, young fellow (*pointing to the room on the right*). I'm off now to exercise horses with our brigade leader.

Amina and **Eli**: Right. Thank you, uncle.

Eli: Amina, did you know this Comrade Sadik?

Amina: Yes. We were at school together.

Eli: So he's your schoolmate.

Amina (*opening her case to take out scarf, towel and mug*): Yes, after we graduated from the stock-breeding and veterinary school, we both meant to go on to university. But he has so many younger brothers and sisters, his parents wanted him to get a job to help the family financially. So he gave it up.

Eli: Hmm, a pigeon has brittle bones.

Amina: He may have turned into an eagle now.

Eli: An eagle?

Amina: Yes. (*Calmly*) Still, how could an ordinary vet from a secondary technical school give such complex treatment? No wonder he got infected.

Eli: Yes, science isn't child's play. (*He carries Amina's luggage into the left room.*)

Herdsman (*enters*): Are these your cases, comrade?

Amina: Yes, thank you. Would you take them to that room?

(*Exit herdsman with the cases. As Amina is about to take her raincoat and basket to the left room, Maira rushes out panting from behind the fence. Her sleeves are rolled up, she has a scarf on her head and two long braids coiled on her neck. She is wearing a pink gown with a white apron, and her legs and feet are bare. She stands on top of the bank looking anxiously round.*)

Maira: Hey, comrade. (*Surprised*) Amina!

Amina (*overjoyed*): Maira!

Maira: Ah! (*She rushes down from the bridge.*) Darling Amina! (*Embraces her.*) Dear old school friend.

Amina: You never dreamed of this, did you? I was meaning to go and look for you after putting my things away.

Maira (*not letting Amina go, but excitedly hugging her and patting her back*): I never dreamed of such a thing, my turtle-dove.

Amina: All right, all right. That's enough, you silly girl. You're still behaving like a butterfly.

Maira: Not *like* a butterfly, I *am* a butterfly. I flit through the flowers all day like a bee after pollen, clinging to the petals.

Amina (*hesitantly*): What? Are you keeping bees?

Maira: That's right. I've become a bee-keeper. Look at you, still so pretty.

Amina (*interrupting her*): Stop joking. Let's talk seriously.

Maira: Ah, look at your ear-rings, what a lovely design! They must come from Urumchi.

Amina: No, when I passed Ining, a friend bought them in Stalin Avenue for me.

Maira: So you have a lover now. Haha, trying to keep it a secret from your old friend, eh? At school didn't you say you would never dance or have a boy friend? You swore a solemn oath you'd not get married until you'd made your mark. Now you've graduated from the university, I suppose you're ready to get married. Is that right?

Amina (*seriously*): No. How about you?

Maira: I'm following your example. I shan't be twenty-five for three more years, so what's the hurry? I'll wait till there's nothing in the world for me to do, then marry anybody I come across, driver, teacher, dancer or singer.

Amina: Weren't you trained in disease prevention? How is it you've changed to bee-keeping?

Maira: That's a long story. I wasn't all that keen on being a vet. My ideal is to be an actress, and everybody says I've got what it takes. (*Amina laughs.*) What are you laughing at? Even the film people who came last year said I had a future in acting. But I let the school authorities send me here. Before coming I had an idealized picture of the grasslands: all beautiful scenery,

fragrant flowers, clear, gurgling streams, plenty of butter and milk, horses to ride and songs to sing.... But once I was here I found it's not like that. Vetting horses is no job for girls like us.

Amina: Why not?

Maira: You'll soon find out. So I asked the head of the farm to let me learn to keep bees. Just think, bees spend all their time bumbling through the flowers, sipping nectar and making honey. What fun!

Amina (*laughing, then calming down and catching hold of her*): Don't go. Listen to me, Maira. I think it's a mistake to give up your own job so casually. You studied for three whole years in the technical school, then worked here all this time. Don't throw all that away. Oh, listen, your mother is well and thinking of you. She's sent you a whole heap of things and a letter.

(*As they walk to the door they meet Kasen, back from the mountains.*)

Kasen: Maira, I heard some people had come. Anybody I know?

Maira: How can I tell? This is Comrade Amina, do you know her?

(*Amina salutes Kasen, who is embarrassed.*)

Kasen: I.... (*Introducing himself*) I am Kasen.

Amina: How do you do? (*Exeunt Amina and Maira.*)

(*Kasen turns to make off but bumps into Eli who enters.*)

Kasen: Sorry. (*He looks up and is surprised*) Ah!

Eli (*totters backward, wipes the tips of his boots on his trousers and throws Kasen a dirty look*): Steady on, there. There's no melon-skin on the ground.

Kasen (*clutching his cap in surprise*): Eli?

Eli: Kasen!

Kasen (*rushing to embrace him*): My old schoolmate, my friend! (*He excitedly hugs him. They take hands and sing, "Before tall poplars by the Ili River, there is our garden of friendship." Both laugh.*)

Kasen (*putting his cap in his boot*): Ah, my future assistant, lecturer and expert, what are you doing here?

Eli: I've come to get practical experience.

Kasen: Welcome, welcome. Good, we need more vets. How are you? How are things at home?

Eli: All right. You know our business became a state-private enterprise* long ago and I've stopped living on my family. Ah, your gun is not bad. Smart fellow! That'll get you food and give you courage. What are you doing? Are you on you way somewhere?

Kasen: No, I just got back from the mountains where I've been checking up on cattle diseases.

Eli: That's splendid. Tell your old schoolmate your experience in preventing disease, and I'll help sum it up.

Kasen: There's not much to say. Everyone knows how to raise cows and horses.

Eli: Not necessarily. It's a most complicated science. What have you been doing here all these years?

Kasen: Working at disease prevention, as a herdsman and vet.

Eli: Been doing all right?

Kasen: We've had our difficulties. Early this summer, for instance, Sadik and I were looking for a way to cure horses with intussusception. Sadik's an ingenious, hard-working fellow. But in the end he got infected and nearly lost his life. He's still in hospital, I'm worried about him. But let's not talk about that now. Come on, let's have a few drinks to welcome you.

Eli: Have you taken to drinking?

Kasen: Only to keep out the cold up in the mountains. Come on.

Eli: No, thanks. I'm not drinking any more.

Kasen: You have somebody looking after you, eh?

Eli: How about you? Have you got a girl?

Kasen: Yes.

Eli: Imagine that! And you're growing a beard.

Kasen: To show my devotion.

Eli: Who is she?

Kasen: Pashahan.

Eli: Pashahan? The one in the Ining hospital?

Kasen: That's right, she's a doctor.

*In such enterprises the means of production are controlled by the state, which pays the former capitalist owner regular interest on the shares in his hands at the time when the business becomes a joint enterprise

Eli: So everything's perfect, eh?

Kasen: Well, yes and no.

Eli: What could be better than a vet marrrying a doctor?

Kasen: Things couldn't be better between the two of us, but her mother is backward.

Eli: Backward? In what way?

Kasen: She keeps writing, urging me to go to Ining to get married.

Eli: Why is getting married backward?

Kasen: She means, friend, that once I'm married I can ask to be transferred to Ining.

Eli: Well then, why not work in Ining?

Kasen: Go back to Ining? This is the epidemic season and we're short-handed. How can I throw up the work? Besides, our director says young people should steel themselves where things are toughest. Isn't that right?

Eli: Of course it is. But if you don't listen to your mother-in-law and offend her, you'll lose your girl.

Kasen: What of it? I can't let her mother lead me by the nose like a cow.

Eli: Marriage is a big thing in life. Don't take it so casually.

Kasen: How can you accuse me of being casual, dear friend? We should be single-minded in our work, especially in our type of job, which needs time.

Eli: Then will you give up Pashahan?

Kasen: Why, if not for her....

Eli: You're still such a kid after all these years. Come on, let's go inside and have a good talk. (*Chatting, they enter the room.*)

(*Sounds of a horse galloping and whinnying. Bebesh comes out from the shack with her bucket.*)
(*Enter Wu Chun.*)

Wu: Bebesh, have the new-comers settled in?

Bebesh: Yes, they've been given rooms.

(*Amina, who has spruced herself up, comes out quickly. Maira, holding a bundle, hides behind her.*)

Maira: It's Farm Head Wu.

Amina: Farm Head Wu.

Wu: So you are Comrade Amina?

Amina: Yes.
Maira (*adding his title*): Director.
Amina: How are you, director?
Wu: This is fine. (*He shakes hands with her.*) I've just come back from the agricultural brigade, so I dropped in to have a look.
Eli (*coming out*): Director Wu!
Wu (*turning*): This must be Comrade Eli.
Eli: Yes.
Maira (*pointing at Amina*): Her fiancé.
Wu: Oh. How are you? (*They shake hands.*)
Eli: How do you do?
Wu (*chuckling*): So you knew each other before?
Amina and **Maira**: Yes. (*They exchange smiles.*)
Amina: We were schoolmates.
Wu: Splendid.
Kasen: Director Wu.
Wu: So you're back from the mountains, Kasen.
Kasen: Yes, I've just got back.
Eli: We were schoolmates too. I asked him to stay to pass on his experience in preventing disease and to tell us about the situation here.
Wu: Sure. You're all young specialists. You talk a common language.
Amina: You're too polite, director. You're the real expert.
Wu: Not at all. I know very little about horses. I've barely been here a year and I'm only just able to talk a bit with the workers. In other words, I've just become articulate. (*They laugh.*)
Bebesh (*coming out with mare's milk*): Please have some mare's milk.
Wu: Come on, sit down. Well, are you all settled?
Amina and **Eli**: Yes, thank you.
Wu: Conditions here are rough. There are many difficulties.
Eli: We're not afraid.
Amina: We've come because there are difficulties.
Wu: That's the spirit. Coming here means you have made a big decision. Helping agriculture is the most important task in our country now. I hope you will dedicate your knowledge, youth and wisdom to our cattle-raising production front.

Amina (*excitedly*): Does that mean we can go straight to the agricultural front?
Eli: Why, in college we wrote applications volunteering to aid the agricultural front.
Wu: That's fine.
Kasen: Horse-breeding is a good way of helping agriculture. Last year alone we sent out three thousand B-grade plough-horses.
Eli: Oh.
Maira: This year we shall send out four thousand.
Amina: Hmm.
Wu: And next year we plan to send out five thousand A and B grade plough-horses.
Amina and **Eli** (*amazed*): Oh!
Wu: Each horse will be strictly examined before going out, to make sure it's free from disease. Each one must be sleek and sturdy, able to pull ploughs and sowing-machines. We're planning to send one batch after another to all the farms and mountain regions to help our country's agricultural production.
Amina: So disease prevention, if it's well done, actually helps the agricultural front.
Eli (*excitedly*): That means this is a station for "animal power."
Wu: Yes, the peasants call our farm the small-tractor factory. (*They laugh.*)
Wu (*more enthusiastically*): The fact of the matter is that at present farming in China still relies on manual labour and draught animals. So your work of caring for cattle and preventing disease is extremely important.
Bukara (*appearing on the bridge with a whip*): Aha, now I've caught you, director, you fat camel!
Wu (*turning*): Ah, Brigade Leader Bukara. How are you?
Bukara: Greetings, all.
All the Youngsters: How are you?
Wu (*to the youngsters*): You go on chatting.
Bukara: Old Wu, why d'you keep avoiding your customers? (*He sticks the whip in his boot.*) Are you afraid to do business?
Wu: It's not business I'm afraid of but your tongue.
Bukara: I'm not a big talker.
Wu: We all know you have the gift of the gab.

Bukara: It's nothing to compare with your big guns. After all you were a regimental commander.

Wu: I suppose you want to buy horses?

Bukara: I don't want many. Just two heavy cart-horses for our brigade.

Wu: You could have several hundred or a thousand — if your commune were able to cope with them.

Bukara (*in an expansive mood*): Of course. Our commune has the stomach of a camel, and we started from scratch.

Wu: Yes, and for your own good we're not sending any horses out for the moment.

Bukara: So you think we're too poor to buy your horses, eh?

Wu: No, it's good to be poor. Didn't Chairman Mao say that when you're poor you've an incentive to change for the better?

Bukara (*spreading his hands helplessly*): But how can we change?

Wu: By hard work.

Bukara: We need help for that from you, the big boss.

Wu: Help, yes. Not empty promises. We must take a responsible attitude.

Bukara: What have you to be responsible for?

Wu: At present all the horse diseases are still latent. Wouldn't it give you more trouble if you took over sick horses? When spring comes the horses are in poor condition after losing weight in the winter. It's easier then to find out which of them are sick.

Eli (*eagerly*): Director Wu, I'd like to help change the situation and keep the horses fit through the winter and spring.

Wu: Oh? What do you propose?

Eli (*confidently*): I'll find new, lush pastures. Kasen will help me.

Kasen: Yes, I'll help.

Wu: Good. When there's a new proposal, we must all support it. (*To Bukara*) And just now some of our horses have intussusception which is fatal unless you operate. That operation....

Amina (*summoning up courage*): Director Wu, this is still a big unsolved problem. Let me work on it.

Maira (*tugging at her to stop her*): Amina....

Wu: Good, that's fine. But your first job is to help in the general disease prevention work in our brigade. What's especially important is to bring the foals through the spring.

Amina and **Eli** (*eagerly*): Oh, yes.

Bukara: Aha, big boss, with all your experts on disease prevention, how can I buy sick horses from you?

Aman (*running in*): Director Wu, people have come from the county office to buy horses. They're waiting in your office.

Bukara: See how brisk business is here. You're busier than a festival bazaar. Go quickly.

Wu: All right, Aman. Tell them to wait a minute. I'll come presently.

Aman: Yes. (*Runs off.*)

Wu: Well, let's drink up this mare's milk. (*He lifts his bowl and nods to the others.*) Come on, drink up. (*They raise their bowls.*)

Wu (*cheerfully*): You are fine young people equipped with knowledge, new blood for the state. What the Kazakhs would call "brave eagles." I wish you success on the disease prevention front.

All the Young People (*respectfully*): Thank you, director. (*They drink up.*)

Wu: Good, you must rest for a couple of days. So long. (*Exit.*)

Bukara (*raising his whip*): Fine, fine! (*He goes off with Wu.*)

The Young People (*waving*): Goodbye.

Amina (*turning*): Maira, in my opinion....

Maira: No, I prefer to keep bees.

Amina: Then could you lend me all your technical books? I didn't bring many with me.

Maira: All right, come with me and we'll get them.

Amina: Let's go. (*Exit with Maira.*)

Eli: Let's go to the stables, Kasen. I want to see your feeding arrangements.

Kasen: Right-o.

Eli: That's a fine gun of yours.

Kasen: You like hunting? (*Exeunt.*)

(Singing in the distance. Presently Sadik strolls up, looking at the fields. He has a rucksack on his back, a leather jacket over one shoulder, and carries a walking stick and a pot of flowers. He is wearing a lambskin cap, riding breeches and boots. Not tall but sturdy, he has a big ruddy face, thick eyebrows and shrewd sparkling eyes. His neck is still bandaged after his operation, but he is very glad to be back. The sound of singing draws nearer.)

Ah, boundless clear sky,

White floating clouds;
Boundless grasslands
Where songs drift far, far away;
Cold winds blow away the years of suffering,
Spring breezes bring the scent of flowers....

Sadik (*sitting on the railing of the bridge and looking round*): Ah.

Bebesh (*coming out to clear the table, sees someone on the bridge with his back to her*): Who's that?

Sadik (*turning, affectionately*): Bebesh.

Bebesh (*surprised*): Ah? Sadik! So you're back. (*Runs to the bridge.*)

Sadik: Yes, I'm back.

Bebesh: Are you better?

Sadik: Completely better. Don't I look it? Don't you believe me, little sister? You used to ask why the grassland has no flowers in winter. Well, this pot of flowers will bloom all the year round. My mother sent it to me in hospital. I didn't want to leave it there, so you can have it. I've brought you something else too, Bebesh.

Bebesh (*taking the pot but still looking doubtfully at his bandaged neck*): What is it?

Sadik: Guess.

Bebesh: Give it to me. (*Excitedly*) Give it me.

Sadik: First guess.

Behesh: A book?

Sadik: That's right, a book.

Bebesh: Auntie, mum! Doctor Sadik is back. (*She runs into the house.*)

(*Sadik throws down his stick and walks over the bridge.*)

Kaisha (*emerging from the house*): Sadik, Sadik! My child, my darling colt, so you're back.

Kulysh (*coming out of the house*): Ah, I never expected you back so soon.

Sadik (*respectfully greeting them*): Good morning.

Kulysh (*doubtfully*): Are you really all right?

Sadik (*sitting by the table*): Of course I am, auntie.

Kaisha: Really? Show me your discharge from the hospital.

Kulysh: Yes, let's see it.

Sadik: Of course, of course. (*He removes his rucksack and takes out some apples.*) These are for you, auntie.

Kulysh (*quickly taking them in her apron*): What fine fresh apples.

Sadik: Those are from my mother. (*Offering some to Kaisha*) Taste them.

Kaisha (*refusing to accept them*): No, this won't do. Show us your discharge first.

Sadik: Taste an apple first, auntie.

Kaisha: Don't try to stop my mouth. You can't do it even with a leg of mutton. If you've come back before you're completely well, my old man is going to be angry and you'll catch it from the director too.

Sadik: Don't you believe it. Try this first, auntie. I've got my papers.

Kulysh: You have? Show me.

Sadik (*producing a paper which he reads to them*): Discharge from hospital.

Kaisha: It's true. Thank Heaven. Now it's all right.

Kulysh: Good. I was mixing dough. I'll bake some bread for him. (*She goes into the house.*)

Kaisha: Rest a while, child. I'll get some cream and make you some tea.

Sadik (*pleased*): Thank you, auntie. (*He puts on his cap and straightens his clothes.*)

Kaisha: What's there to thank us for? (*Exit.*)

Bebesh (*with a towel over one shoulder and a pot of water*): First have a wash. (*She pours water over his hands.*)

Sadik (*washing his hands*): Well, Bebesh, are your cows doing well?

Bebesh: Yes.

Sadik: Are they giving more milk?

Bebesh: All but one. She's sick and gives very little milk, thin milk at that. But I don't know how to cure her.

Sadik: Is that the cow with the spotted nose?

Bebesh: No, it's the Holstein that used to give most milk.

Sadik: Ah, then I must have a look at her. (*Dries his hands, crosses the bridge and enters the shed.*)

Bebesh: Ah, teacher, I shouldn't have told you. What a fool I am! (*Enters the house with her pot.*)

(*Amina comes in perspiring with a load of books, humming to herself. She is about to enter her room when Eli runs up in high spirits, the gun in one hand and a wild duck in the other.*)

Eli (*standing on the bridge holding up the duck*): Look, Amina!
Amina (*turning and stopping*): What's that?
Eli: A swan!
Amina: A wild duck. You shot it?
Eli: (*proudly*): Yes.
Amina: Why, it's as plump as a lamb.
Eli: Now we're in the grasslands we ought to enjoy some game.
Amina: It's too much trouble.
Eli: What trouble is it? Don't forget we must relax after work. You get a basin while I sharpen a knife. (*He puts the wild duck on the railing.*) As a first step in practising disease prevention, we'll dissect this duck.
Amina: All right. (*Puts her books on the table, rolls up her sleeves and enters the left-hand room.*)
Eli: Haha.... (*Whistling, he puts down his gun and enters the right-hand room.*)
Sadik (*coming out of the cow-shed and rubbing his hands with cotton, discovers the duck on the railing and is annoyed*): Bebesh, Bebesh!
Bebesh (*coming out surprise to see him red with anger*): What's the matter with the cow?
Sadik: The cow's all right. I treated her with petrol, she'll soon be better. Please throw this wild duck in to the rubbish pit.
Bebesh: Oh! (*She hurries out with the duck.*)

(*Sadik goes to the eaves and climbs on to a stool to take down the lantern.*)

Eli (*coming out with a chopper*): Where's my duck? Where is that duck I bagged?
Sadik: Sorry, comrade, I threw it in the rubbish pit.
Eli: What! (*Furious*) Why?
Sadik (*turning away on the stool*): Because game may carry germs and mustn't be brought near our live-stock. (*Takes down the lantern and makes for the cow-shed.*)
Eli: What rot! Sheer dogmatism. Ignorant clods....
Amina (*enters*): What's up, Eli?
Sadik (*turning in surprise*): Amina? Amina!

Amina (*astonished*): Why, Sadik....
Eli: Sadik?
Sadik: Sorry, but disease prevention must come first.

CURTAIN

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Next spring. Before the stables for mares in foal. At the back of the stage is a fence by which grow luxuriant birch trees. A board on the gate in the middle bears the inscription in Kazakh and Chinese: Stables for Mares in Foal. On the left is a small shed with a corrugated iron roof, its front window showing the sign: Laboratory. To the right of its door are stools and a wooden table piled with drugs, instruments, a registrar of colts, writing materials and reference books. From the eaves hangs a coloured anatomical chart of a horse's head. A similar shed on the left is the Disease Prevention Office. On the table outside it are a teapot and cups, alcohol and cotton. Water is boiling on the stove near by to sterilize instruments. Around both sheds are benches.

It is midday. White clouds are floating in a clear blue sky. Apart from lark-song the grassland is very quiet. Herdsmen in overalls are delivering the mares in the stable. Amina in a white uniform, gauze mask and scarf, is sitting by the small table under the eaves on the left. She is hard at work, glancing from time to time through a book, adding improving touches to the chart and making notes. Three herdsmen on the benches to the right are waiting, whips in hand, for her to stop. Sadik enters.

Amina (*stopping in surprise*): Oh, Comrade Sadik!
Sadik: How are you, Comrade Amina? Well, didn't you know me?
Amina: This time coming back from the mountains you look even more different than last autumn when you came back from the hospital.
Sadik: You mean with my beard?
Amina: So dark and ruddy....
Sadik: Like a butcher....

(*Her face clouds as he piles things on her desk.*)

Sadik: Oh, sorry.

Amina: It's not just your way of working....

Sadik: ... That's peculiar....

Amina: But even the way you look now....

Sadik: ... Just like an ignorant clod, as Eli said.

Amina (*smiling*): Forget it. That's just his way.

Sadik: I was joking. I don't take such things seriously. (*Quickly puts dishes and instruments in the boiling water and pulls a stool up to the stove to sterilize them.*) Where is Comrade Eli?

Amina: Out looking for spring pastures. He wants to break the old pattern and find new, natural pastures, to solve the problem once and for all of horses losing weight in winter and being run down in spring.

Sadik: Splendid. That'll keep him pretty busy.

Amina: Talking about being busy, you're the one who blows here and there all the time like the wind.

Sadik: Especially in early spring.

Amina (*smiling*): When we first came, Brigade Leader Kasymbek cracked you up for your work in the mountains. Called you an eagle on the disease prevention front.

Sadik: He trusts me and wants to encourage me.

(*Amina smiles at the broken china he is using.*)

Sadik (*embarrassed*): What are you laughing at?

Amina: The way you never operate with a scalpel.

Sadik: I do sometimes. I use whatever's handiest. I can't explain it in theory.

Amina: That's unscientific. (*More calmly*) Of course you've struck lucky sometimes. The main thing is you can put up quite happily with these primitive conditions.

Sadik: Not when I first came. I was so disappointed, I cried underneath my quilt!

Amina: How did you manage to settle down finally?

Sadik: That's simple. Once I really started worrying about the horses, the herdsmen looked on me as one of themselves.

Amina: Not just as one of themselves, but as a treasure. Still, I don't understand. You studied Western medicine. Are you studying local methods and prescriptions now or Western medical science?

Sadik: Both. The director says we should use both.

Amina: Frankly speaking, in this job of disease prevention you don't seem to me to be aiming high enough.

Sadik: My aim's simple: just to solve problems.

Amina: Are you succeeding? Have you solved the problem of major operations?

Sadik: No, I haven't yet. (*Glumly*) It's like a desert stretching all around, but I believe we'll solve it eventually. I'm so glad you've come, Amina. I want your help. We must find a solution together.

Amina: But your method of solving the problem is to throw away the scalpel and use bits of broken china. Is that the way to cross the desert and scale the heights?

(*Silence.*)

Amina: We're old schoolmates, you must allow me to talk frankly. (*Puts a dish down on the left table and takes out her notebook.*)

(*Kasymbek comes out of the stable.*)

Sadik: Good morning, Uncle Kasymbek.

Kasymbek: So, Sadik, you're back from the mountains again.

Sadik: I came with Director Wu to check up on the horses we're sending out.

Kasymbek (*chuckling*): Yes, you're really an eagle, flying wherever there's work.

Sadik: How's the foaling going?

Kasymbek: Very well. In the last few days 214 have been born in these stables. All alive.

Sadik: Good. In that case can you leave things here for a while and help me cure some sick horses?

Kasymbek: Didn't you come to make a check up? What's this about curing sick horses?

Sadik: They've just been sent over. They've been ailing a long time.

Kasymbek: Which team's?

Sadik: Three horses from the No. 1 Team. You see....

Kasymbek: You'd better handle it, Sadik. You've special training and practical experience. My old methods are no good. (*Turns to go in.*)

Sadik (*stopping him*): No, uncle. What experience do I have except what I've learned from you? In the last couple of years I've treated some queer diseases but I've never seen anything like this trouble they've got.

Kasymbek: You haven't, eh?

Sadik: No. And they look pretty bad.

Kasymbek: Pretty bad? All right, I'll have a look. (*Exit.*)

Sadik: Right, you go first. I'll come when I'm ready. (*Rubbing his hands.*) Go on with what you were saying, it's all right. (*He stands up and goes to the right table to collect drugs.*)

Amina: It's true. I feel you've changed enormously.

Sadik: Oh?

Amina (*putting down her pen and calmly looking round*): At the technical school you worked very hard....

Sadik: Not as hard as you.

Amina: No, you were a very good student. In order to study science you determined to master Chinese. No matter where you were, if you met a Han student you tried to talk to him. (*Mimicking him*) "Ah, how are you? I live at Number 178 Bazaar Street. Can we be friends?"....

Sadik (*laughing*): Yes, that was the only way I could learn Chinese.

Amina: You were right. We had to learn Chinese to study science. The sad thing is that you had to give up going to university so that your mastery of the language is useless. Now you spend all your time rushing around to cope with ordinary cattle diseases. Seems to me....

Sadik: The work needs me.

Amina: You can't help it, eh? I know that. Still, I think if you really want to do research, you sometimes have to be ruthless. For example, they asked me to see those sick horses just now, but I refused.

Sadik: You may have refused, but I can't.

Amina: I can't see to so many things. There's a limit to everybody's energy.

Sadik: Not necessarily.

Amina: Not necessarily? Look here, when I first came I also made up my mind to study this problem of intussusception, but it's become a sideline I can only work on in my spare time.

Sadik: You have to approach scientific research from different angles, Comrade Amina.

Amina: But the road you take has got to be scientific.

Sadik (*apologetically*): Perhaps I can only wave to you from the roadside.

Amina (*confidently*): Still, I'm sure you'll find your way back to the right road.

Sadik: Well ... let's talk about that later, Amina. Will you come with me to see those sick horses?

Amina: I'm sorry, I can't afford the time. There are still a lot of things I want to look up. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Kasen with his luggage.*)

Kasen: Let me help you, Sadik. Don't you need an assistant?

Sadik: Aren't you in a hurry to leave? I've got everything ready. I can manage.

Kasen: There's still time. I'll go after you've finished operating.

Sadik: You won't be too late?

Kasen: No, it's all right, don't worry. Disease prevention comes first.

Sadik: Good. Bring the medicine kit. (*Exeunt Kasen and Sadik.*)

Kulysh (*comes out calls anxiously*): Doctor, doctor! (*Seeing nobody there, she opens the gate in the fence and meets Kaisha coming out.*) Sister, where is the doctor?

Kaisha: Your side got another foal?

Kulysh: Yes.

Kaisha: Which breed?

Kulysh: The Don.

Kaisha (*happy and surprised*): Oh, a Don foal?

Kulysh: That's right.

Kaisha: We must tell my old man, he'll be so pleased. (*Running off*) Hey, Kasymbek! (*Exit shouting.*)

Kulysh: Doctor Amina. (*Shouting*) Doctor Amina!

Amina (*coming out with a notebook on a book, busily writing*): Yes, auntie?

Kulysh (*turning*): There you are. Do come quickly and help us deliver a foal with your new methods.

Amina: Just do it the way I told you, auntie. I'm too busy to keep running to the stables with you.

Kulysh: But we can't manage this one. It's frightening. After all this time only one leg has come out.

Amina (*shocked*): Ah, a difficult birth?

Kulysh: Yes. Kambar is in a sweat but he can't do a thing.

Amina: All right, I'll have a look. (*Puts down her pen and takes up instruments.*) You bring the bath tub, auntie. (*Exit.*)

Kulysh: All right. (*She fetches the tub from under the table and goes out.*)

(*Enter Kasymbek and Kaisha.*)

Kasymbek (*elated*): Good, wonderful. (*Putting his hand to his heart*) This is like breeding silver. This is the most needed horse: it can pull a load of three tons and a half.

Kambar (*running in mopping his face*): It looks bad, really bad, brigade leader.

Kasymbek (*shocked*): What's the matter?

Kambar: The mare won't drop her foal and she's in a critical condition. I don't think Amina's good enough to cope, she's only a girl.

Kasymbek: Then go and get Simagazi. (*Enter Amina with a tray of instruments.*) He's an experienced local vet. He can handle it.

Kambar: All right.

Amina: Don't go, uncle. The local method isn't scientific. If he doesn't disinfect things properly the mare may be infected. (*Puts down the instruments and goes to her room.*)

Kasymbek: That's all right. (*Waving his hand*) Go ahead.

Amina (*sternly*): No, uncle. If the mare catches a disease and it spreads, the other mares may not have any more foals in future. Who'll take the responsibility? (*Enters her room.*)

Kaisha: In medical matters, you'd better listen to her.

Kambar: Come and have a look first, brigade leader. (*Kasymbek goes out.*)

Amina (*coming out with her medical kit*): We'll give a local anaesthetic and operate. (*Exit.*)

Kambar and **Kulysh** (*nodding*): Good. (*They follow her.*)

Kaisha: Heavens, these scientific methods make foaling more complicated than having babies. (*She turns and goes through the gate in the fence.*)

(*Silence. From the nearby stables comes the sound of herdsmen singing and the clear laughter of women. Then silence again. Larks sing, horses neigh. Enter Eli, his fur coat unbuttoned, a bottle of wine in his pocket and a rifle over one shoulder. He is carrying a rucksack and whip.*)

Eli (*elatedly, looking round*): Amina, Amina! (*He walks up to the table and looks at the books.*) *Anatomy of Domestic Animals, Pathology and Physiology, General Veterinary Surgery.* Hmm. She's growing very studious. (*Sits down and thinks.*) But is this the right place for research? (*He scratches his chin dubiously, then quickly takes his mug and mirror out of his rucksack and looks at himself in the mirror.*) Ah. Now I look like an ignorant clod myself.

(*Enter Kasen.*)

Kasen: So you're back, Eli.

Eli: Have you been working hard?

Kasen: Give me the rifle, I'm leaving.

Eli: Didn't you say you weren't going? Why have you changed your mind?

Kasen: I didn't want to, but I can't help it.

Eli: What happened?

Kasen: Since early spring her mother has written letter after letter telling me to hurry to Ining. When I ignored her she got Pashahan to write. Just look! (*Takes out a bundle of letters.*) In each one she says, "Ah, larks are singing, spring is here, when I think of my handsome sweetheart my heart burns like fire." Made me as frantic as a colt with glanders, not able to eat or neigh. I meant to wrap up all these letters and send them back, but then the director sent for me. Apparently she wired the director saying her mother was ill. I think this is a trick to get me back, but the director said I mustn't jump to conclusions. Better talk it over with Sadik and go to Ining, then use this chance to explain to them how important our work here is. I never expected Pashahan to play such a trick. Who can have made her do it? Who's pulling her back?

Eli: Her mother, of course.

Kasen: Probably. And that bearded old man of hers too. They're always trying to pull me back.

Eli: You can't say that, friend. I don't understand why you have to stay and work here. Ining is so much better. You're in luck. I only wish I could find a job in Ining, but I haven't pulled it off yet. You can work for socialism in Ining too. (*He sees Kasen is wavering.*) You really don't know what's good for you, old fellow. Let me tell you. (*Sits on the table.*) When I first fell in love with Amina it was quite different. (*Puts one hand on his shoulder, thoughtfully.*) To win her, I was ready to do anything she wanted. When she said she wouldn't marry until she'd made a success of her career, I agreed to wait. I even gave up smoking cigarettes. I swotted away at my scientific thesis, so that we could discuss our work together. Ah....

Kasen: She's certainly as pretty as a flower.

Eli: But this pretty flower grows on a precipice and it's hard to pluck. Your position is different. If I were you, I'd be flying to her home like a swallow all the time. I'd treat her mother even better than my own.

Kasen: What time do I have for that?

Eli: You must spend capital for love. Listen, when you go back take some butter and sausages — what other local products are there here?

Kasen: Our Kazakh smoked beef and milk powder.

Eli: Right. Take several lots of presents. Soon it will be the Corban Festival. You must go there in time for that. Understand?

Kasen: Why, you're quite a man of the world.

Eli: As my father says, "A bird is no bird without feathers."

(*A cart is heard approaching.*)

Carter (*offstage*): Hey, Kasen, it's time to go.

Kasen: Coming! I'll go and get ready. Thanks for your advice. (*Holds out his hand.*)

Eli (*putting his own hands behind his back*): If you want to thank me, leave me your rifle to remember you by.

Kasen: All right, here you are. (*Gives him the rifle.*) Goodbye, friend. (*Exit.*)

Eli: Fine. (*Waving*) Have a pleasant journey.

(*The carter offstage shouts to his horse, the cart rumbles away. Eli turns back and takes up the kettle, meaning to shave. Offstage Kambar is trying to comfort Amina.*)

Kambar: Take it easy, Comrade Amina.

Eli: Here she comes. Good, I'll give her a surprise. (*Takes the kettle, rucksack and rifle into his room.*)

(*Enter Amina, very downcast, carrying her overalls and medicine case. Kambar follows with the tub.*)

Kambar (*calling over the fence*): Sister Kaisha!

Kaisha (*offstage*): Coming.

Kambar: Fetch the kettle for Comrade Amina to wash her hands.

Amina (*sitting guiltily by the table*): I don't know what to do. It's certainly a strange case.

Kambar: If it can't be saved, that's that. Don't worry about it. So long as the mare is all right, there'll be another foal next year.

Amina: But Uncle Kasymbek is furious with me. There he is on his knees by the foal, refusing to go away, looking ever so black.

(*Kaisha comes out with water.*)

Kambar: Of course he feels bad. We horse-breeders get worked up like that. He still wants to save the foal. I must go and have a look. (*Exit.*)

Kaisha: Don't tell me the Don foal is dead?

Amina: Yes.

Kaisha: A fine vet you are! Well, it's like the saying: A woman on horseback still isn't up to a man. (*She puts down the kettle and goes back to the stable.*)

Amina (*trying to catch her*): Auntie....

Kaisha (*offstage*): I thought she was a swan, but she's only a white hen.

Amina: Auntie....

(*Amina covers her face with her hands and sits down at the table to think. Maira runs in with a veil over her face and shoulders.*)

Maira: Amina, Amina! (*Discovers her.*) Amina, I'm leaving.

Amina: What's happened? (*Quietly keeps her head lowered.*)

Maira: When I was clearing out the hives at noon, my dear, some bees stung my face.

Amina (*taking her hands*): Sit down. I'll bathe it with alcohol to stop the swelling. (*She goes for alcohol.*)

Maira (*sitting by the table, weeping*): I can't stand it here ... I must have a talk with Director Wu. I want to go back to Ining.... (*Amina bathes her face.*) Oh!...

Amina: Don't move. Don't cry.

Maira: Suppose I stayed on and one day all the bees turned against me and stung me so that I looked horrible, how could I ever join a song and dance troupe? How could I ever perform in Peking and Shanghai?

Amina: Do stop thinking of acting. The road of life isn't just play-acting.

Maira: No, no, no. I don't want to take this road here. We shall ride buses and trains, but no more horses for me. (*Gets up to leave.*)

Amina: You're being very silly, Maira.

Maira: You're the clever one. Interested in research too, but have you found a cure for intussusception?

Amina (*dejectedly*): No, I haven't. It preys on my mind. But do you think I can study here quietly?

Maira (*clenching her fists*): Of course not. Just wait and they'll make you shear sheep too.

Amina: Director Wu wants me to combine research with production....

Maira: So you have your difficulties too. Goodbye.

Amina: Maira....

(*Enter Bukara with a leather jacket over his shoulders, carrying a whip. He waylays Maira.*)

Bukara: What luck!

(*Maira quickly veils her face.*)

Bukara: Comrade Maira, I've been looking for you everywhere.

Maira (*turning away from him*): What for?

Bukara (*urgently*): There's an infectious disease in one of our teams which is threatening the whole herd. Director Wu tells me

you're a good vet and I should ask you to help. Come along to my cart now.

Maira (*frantic*): What! I'm a bee-keeper. I've changed my job.

Bukara (*chuckling*): My dear vet, a cuckoo should alight on green trees, not buzz through the flowers like a bee.

Maira (*stopping her ears*): Stop that! I'm not singing a duet with you.

Bukara (*lifting his whip*): Then I'll pull off your veil.

Amina: Comrade Bukara....

Bukara: Here's a letter, see, in the director's own writing.

Amina: Let me see it. (*Reads.*) "Comrade Maira, spring has come when cattle diseases spread, and an infectious disease has broken out in the Tienshan Commune which threatens our stud farm. Brigade Leader Bukara has come with his cart to fetch you to help them wipe out this disease. Curing a disease is harder than prevention. It's an arduous, glorious task. But with your experience I'm sure you can handle it. I wish you success. All the best. Wu Chun."

Maira: Oh.

Amina: You'd better go.

Maira: I can't....

Amina (*earnestly*): Orders are orders.

Maira (*pulling off her veil*): How can I go like this?

Bukara (*shocked*): Oh!

Maira: I haven't recovered yet from these stings.

Bukara: Never mind, don't worry. My wife knows how to deal with this. With two hundred grammes of honey and half a catty of wine I guarantee she'll soon have you looking as pretty as a flower. (*Giving her his jacket*) Come on, come on!

Amina (*pushing her*): Go on, Maira.

Bukara (*pushing her*): Come on. In our place no bees will sting you. Soft breezes will caress you, you'll hear nothing but beautiful songs, see nothing but smiles. (*He urges Maira off.*)

Maira (*offstage*): No, no....

(*Bukara offstage whistles to his horse. The cart rumbles away.*)

Amina (*waving from under the tree*): Goodbye, Maira! (*She turns and stops short.*)

(*Kasymbek walks up to the tree in a towering temper, followed by Kambar.*)

Kambar: Old brigade leader....

Kasymbek: Listen to you, listen to you, bah! This is how you kill my precious Don foal. (*Throws down the broken china used for the operation and takes off his apron.*) Your science is no good. I shall report this to headquarters.

Amina (*not daring to move*): Report to headquarters?

Kasymbek: You've taken such an irresponsible attitude to our work.

Amina (*leaning against the tree*): No, that's not fair.

Kasymbek: And you refused to call in the local vet.

Amina: Uncle, the local method is unscientific.

Kasymbek: Bah, science! You want science, but we want foals. (*Walks away.*)

Kambar: Brother Kasymbek, Comrade Amina is young and has no experience.

Kasymbek: Yet she thinks she can perform an operation. Why, she couldn't even cut off a horse's tail. (*Exit.*)

Kambar: The foal's already dead, Brother Kasymbek. (*Runs after* him.)

(*Amina leans on the table and weeps.*)

Eli (*in a gay cap, newly shaved, kicks open the door and says angrily*): Let him go and report you. These petty-minded dolts.

Amina (*looking up*): Eli....

Kambar (*comes back*): So Comrade Eli is back.

Eli (*wanting to comfort Amina, but refraining. Angrily*): Yes, I'm back.

(*Amina sits silent, covering her face with a handkerchief.*)

Kambar (*comfortingly*): Don't worry, Comrade Amina. The old man is like that. All sunshine when things go well, all ice and frost when things go badly. It's because he takes his job so seriously. We have a saying: Bungling a job hurts worse than death. All right, in future we must try harder. If the rein doesn't hold, we'll grab the halter. There now, have a good rest. (*Pours tea for her.*) I'll fetch my *dumbra* and sing you a good tale of Altai.

Eli: Thanks for your concern. (*Takes the teapot.*) No need to sing. This isn't a festival or singing contest.

Kambar (*stopping*): Young fellow, I was trying to cheer her up. You should know how badly we need people with the guts to do this work.

Eli: That'll do. She isn't a baby.

Kambar: A whip may not down her, but her wings aren't strong yet.

Eli: Don't worry, we can fly away.

Kambar: Fly? Where to? You haven't yet solved the problem of bringing horses through the winter in good condition.

Eli (*confidently*): Don't worry. I've found the solution. (*Arrogantly*) I've found a rich pasture for the spring. The mares of the No. 2 Team have been moved there already.

Amina (*encouraged*): Good, Eli, that's very good.

Kambar: Where is this place, Comrade Eli?

Eli: Shati.

Kambar (*shocked*): What? Shati?

Eli: Yes, Shati.

Kambar: Damn! (*Scratching his head in dismay, turns away quickly.*)

Amina (*sensing something wrong, stands up with her hands on the table*): What is it?

Eli: What's wrong with Shati?

Kambar (*turning*): This won't do, friend.... You can't herd horses in Shati.

Eli and **Amina** (*scared*): Why not?

Kambar: Excuse me, young fellow, but I have to report this to headquarters. (*Turns and hurries away.*)

Amina: Wait, uncle. Why can't we herd horses in Shati? Have you ever tried it?

Kambar (*stopping*): No, never.

Eli (*insolently*): No? A blind eagle can't see the rabbit on the ground.

Kambar (*turning*): Now then, young fellow, that's no way to talk.

Amina (*stopping him, earnestly*): Don't lose your temper, uncle. You know he hasn't been here long and doesn't know much about pastures. Tell us what you know of that place, so that he can reconsider.

Kambar: Just this: there are devils there. (*Exit quickly.*)

Eli (*laughing in relief*): Listen to the ballad-monger with his talk of devils and ghosts. The ignorant clod. Idealist!

Amina (*stopping him*): Don't say such things. He's an old hand, he may have had some experience.

Eli: Experience? Bah. These people are so fettered by their limited experience that all they can do is crawl. (*Puts an arm around her.*) Amina.

Amina: What? Have you been drinking?

Eli: Ah, it's freezing up there in the tents. I just had a drop.

Amina: You shouldn't drink even a drop. Have you forgotten what you promised me?

Eli: No, I haven't forgotten. I promise not to drink any more. (*He empties his wine flask.*) Drinking is a very bad habit. Amina....

Amina: Stop that.

Eli: Why? Because of a foal, must we go and hang ourselves?

Amina: It's not just that. I feel very confused.

Eli: Amina, look at me. Have I lost much weight?

Amina: No. (*Pauses.*) Why do you ask me that each time you come back? I'm not a mirror.

Eli: You are. You're my mirror, the mirror of my heart. Look at these ear-rings you always wear.

Amina: I shan't lose them.

Eli: I should hope not. One is your heart, the other is mine.

Amina: What an imagination you have!

Eli: So I want you to tell me whether I've grown leaner or fatter.

Amina: You haven't lost weight. You're more sunburnt, quite ruddy and healthy.

Eli: You're just trying to comfort me. I can't get used to this life in the country.

Amina: Life in the mountains is hard, but you gain something from it.

Eli: All I've gained is the determination to go back to Ining to teach after my return to Urumchi. How about you?

Amina: I'll do the same as you, as before.

Eli: Good, then we must get ready. (*Excitedly*) I came back this time in a hurry because I want to write a summary of my work of finding new pastures to keep the horses fit through the winter and spring. Then I can take the thesis back to college and ask for an assignment. We'll go to Ining together. That's a wonderful place, Amina. Orchards and parks everywhere, with

Act 1 Amina and Eli come to the farm and meet Sadik

Act 2 Director Wu gives the young people things to keep warm

Act 2 Amina urges Eli to correct his mistake

Act 3 Sadik says goodbye to Amina

tall, waving poplars.... Remember that evening we went and sat in the orchard of the club, on the bench under the grape-vine? My parents once sat there too. That fine orchard used to belong to my family. It was I who suggested selling it to the state.

Amina: I know, that's what made you different from other students.

Eli: Yes, it was right to let the state have that beautiful place to build a club-house.

Amina: Yes, now it's a pleasure park for the people of Ining.

Eli: Yes, a pleasure park for the people of Ining and a place where we'll often go. And there's the quiet, blue river....

Amina: Not blue, green. It's a lovely river.

Eli: Lovely as a green silk girdle. We shall stroll chatting over the green turf in the birch wood by the river. The apple trees will be blossoming now.

Amina: No. (*Shaking her head doubtfully*) But you know, our job is here.

Eli: Job? Before I came, I didn't realize that this is a place with no spring or summer, just sudden hailstorms and snowstorms. Why, up in the mountains and out in the grassland it still seems the depth of winter.

Amina: But how do the other people like Sadik manage here?

Eli: Go on back to your room now. (*Takes down the chart.*) Concentrate on your research for that operation.

Amina: No, that wouldn't be right. The director says during the foaling season our main job is to ensure an increase in foals.

Eli: That won't do for you. (*Collecting her books*) This is no place for research. Which is your most important job?

Amina: The work has to be done, as Sadik once said. I must do both. It's my fault for not realizing what it meant coming to a farm. This isn't like studying in college, when you can do things your own way.

Eli (*interrupting*): You should do things your own way. Otherwise you'll be like a lamb lost in the Gobi and never reach the grassy hills. (*Picks up the books.*) Come on.

Amina: Don't be in such a hurry. (*Earnestly puts her hands on his shoulders.*) So long as you back me up, I'm sure I shall discover those hills one day and drink from the clear fountains there. (*She enters the tent followed by Eli.*)

(Wu Chun and Kasymbek rush out from the stables and meet Sadik.)

Wu: Don't worry, uncle, don't worry.... Ah, Sadik, you're here just in time. Go in, quick, and have a look.

Sadik: I know. *(He enters the stables, followed by Kasymbek.)*

(Eli comes out from the tent.)

Wu: You're back early, Comrade Eli.

Eli: Yes, I had to hurry. I've already sent the mares to the new pasture I found.

Wu: So I heard.

Eli: The plan is in my satchel. If you'll sit down, I'll get it.

Wu: Yes, get it so that you can criticize me.

Eli *(pausing)*: Criticize you? What for?

Wu: For my bureaucracy, young fellow.

Eli: Ha, you're fond of a joke, director. *(Turns to go.)*

Amina *(enters)*: Good morning, Director Wu. *(Opens her notebook on the table.)* Let me report on my work. I'm taking part in the foaling and disease prevention, at the same time carrying on my special research. According to all the books, when we operate for intussusception, nine horses out of ten will die....

Wu: Suppose we speak first about keeping the foals alive?

Amina: All right.

Wu: The herdsmen were most upset by the death of the Don foal.

Amina: I know....

Wu: They'd put so much work into it.

Amina *(looks at him and retreats to sit on a bench)*: But what could I do?

Wu: Since you couldn't do anything, you caught it, eh?

Amina: Yes, it caused a storm that nearly shattered me.

Wu *(chuckling)*: No loss of limb, I hope.

Amina: No, I'm all right.

Wu: All right, but easily stumped. Finding the work hard?

Amina: ... Yes. *(She lowers her head and closes her notebook.)*

Wu: This reminds me of a story. During the War of Liberation a friend of mine had one leg hit by enemy fire. After leaving hospital he walked with a stick, his useless leg dangling and giving him a lot of trouble. I advised him to have it cut off. Well,

he glared at me and said, "Get away. Saw it off? Wouldn't that make me a cripple?"

Amina: Didn't he realize he was already a cripple?

Wu: No, he still thought he was a soldier who could charge ahead, when actually he'd already left the front.

Amina *(moved)*: You mean ... I'm walking on one leg?

Wu: A pity for you if that's the case. Better learn from him.

Amina: Am I a cripple?

Wu: Unless you can solve problems, you'll fall down on your job.

Amina *(smiling helplessly)* ... Director Wu ... ah.... *(Rests her head on her books and sobs.)*

Wu: Come now, Comrade Amina. *(Sits down beside her.)* You feel badly treated, right? You're willing to study hard, and that's good. But you mustn't have too narrow an outlook: that's the biggest enemy in our work. It can stop you seeing the light of science. You concentrate on book learning and think nothing else is scientific, but you ignore the importance of practice, although all science is the result of practical experience. Still, I'm sure all diseases, difficult births, intussusception or splenic fever, will be conquered and wiped out by young people like you and Sadik who have the courage and confidence to tackle them. You'll storm the heights of this science.

(From the stables comes the sound of cheering and rhythmic clapping.)

Kulysh *(offstage)*: Doctor, doctor! *(Runs in excitedly.)* Doctor! Oh, Director Wu, the Don foal has come to life.

Amina *(with a start)*: Oh, who revived it?

Kulysh: Sadik.

Amina *(thoughtfully)*: ... Sadik?... *(Turns and runs off.)*

Kulysh *(admiringly)*: What skill — he's a wizard. *(Runs off.)*

Eli *(entering with his satchel and plan)*: Director Wu. *(Puts down the satchel.)* See, here's my plan of the new pasture. You couldn't ask for better water and grass.

Wu: I'm afraid it won't do, Comrade Eli. It won't do at all.

Eli: Who says so?

Wu *(turning round)*: All the herdsmen. At Comrade Sadik's suggestion we talked it over. Your plan will have to be scratched. *(Starts off.)*

Eli *(stupefied)*: What?... So this was Sadik's suggestion again?

Wu (*pausing*): Yes. Before moving the horses you should have come back to ask for permission. How could you make the decision yourself to move the mares of No. 2 Team there?

Eli: I meant to ask permission, but the other director was out collecting manure and you and the other cadres were busy with disease prevention in the mountains. I couldn't find anyone.

Wu: You should at least have consulted the herdsmen then, especially the old hands with experience.

Eli: The older they are, the more conservative....

Wu: Comrade Eli....

Eli (*hastily*): I didn't mean that. But tell me what's wrong with Shati?

Wu: That's what I should be asking you. It was your job to find that out. (*Earnestly*) You should have stayed there doing an honest job, making a thorough study of the terrain, direction of the wind, water, grass and climatic conditions.

Eli: As far as that goes, I did stick it there for two days and two nights.

Wu: That's not long enough. If you'd completed a thorough survey by early summer, that would have been quick work.

Eli: You mean I should go back?

Wu: That would be the responsible attitude.

Eli: Wasn't it a good idea to move the mares there?

Wu: Hard to say. We're going to notify the No. 2 Team to move them back at once.

Eli: That's impossible. Our period of practice here is nearly over. We're in a hurry to go back to college.

Wu: Comrade Eli, your period of practice may be nearly over, but how can a young revolutionary in the age of Mao Tse-tung think his responsibility to the state at an end? Eh? Think it over, young fellow.

(*Silence. Wu leaves. Eli dejectedly puts away his plan and sits glumly on the railing. Offstage herdsmen are cheering and playing with the foals.*)

Aha, little tiger!
Aha, little deer!
My treasure, apple of my eye!

Kambar (*singing and playing his dumbra offstage*): Now the dark clouds have gone,
All is laughter and merriment;
As we sing our songs
Old women feel like girls again....

(*The laughter of women is heard and clapping. Eli is in low spirits. Sadik hurries on carrying medicine bottles.*)

Sadik (*sitting at the table to make notes*): So you're back, Comrade Eli.

Eli: Yes.

Sadik: Twenty-one cases of still-born foals brought to life....

Eli (*sighing*): Hmm....

Sadik: Aren't you feeling well?

Eli (*coldly*): No.

Sadik: Oh? What's the trouble?

Eli: My foot hurts.

Sadik (*concerned*): How did that happen?

Eli: My boots pinch me.

Sadik: Too tight?

Eli: Yes, too tight and my feet are frost-bitten.

Sadik: Frost-bite, eh? Let me have a look. I know what to do.

Eli: You? What's your job?

Sadik: I'm a vet.

Eli: I'm not an animal.

Sadik (*earnestly*): Even a mountain of ice should have melted by now, friend. Do stop bearing me a grudge because of that duck. Let me have a look at your foot. It'll be a nuisance if it festers. (*Looks at Eli's foot.*) It's frost-bitten all right. You should never wear such thin boots to the mountains. (*Chafes his foot for him.*)

Eli (*angrily*): But in Ining the apple-blossom is already out.

Sadik (*holding Eli's leg on his knees and rubbing the foot*): It's good here too, with snow lotus all the year round.

Eli (*resting his elbows on the table*): I mean, it's already spring.

Sadik: Spring? In early spring the weather keeps changing. A cold wave may come any time.

Eli (*alarmed*): Oh.... (*Leans on the table and thinks.*)

Sadik: Why? What are you afraid of?

Eli: Me? Nothing.

Sadik: How's that? Better now?

Eli: Better.

Sadik: A little massage will set it right. Soak it in hot water this evening. How about the other foot?

Eli: That's all right.

Sadik: You must be careful, Comrade Eli, when you go out to the country or up the mountains.

Eli: I'm not used to living in the country.

Sadik: You'll get used to it. It's a good life, riding and singing, free as the air. And up in the mountains you hear all sorts of strange tales about antelopes with two heads and deer with five legs.... There are plenty of weird animals worth studying. Well, I must go and get ready to examine the horses we're sending out.

Eli: Wait a minute. (*Unable to control himself*) When you're really a thorn, why pretend to be a flower?

Sadik (*turning*): What do you mean?

Eli: Listen! If the weather is changeful in spring and a cold wave may come at any moment, why do you want to drive me back to the country when I only got in today.

Sadik: Who wants to drive you to the country?

Eli: You! (*pauses.*) In front of the director you rejected my plan for a new pasture out of hand. Why? What scientific reasons have you to prove that Shati isn't a good pasture in spring?

Sadik (*understanding*): Oh, that. I wanted to have a good talk with you, Eli, about that. The weather there is very treacherous with lots of snowstorms....

Eli (*interrupting*): And devils too, right?

Sadik: Maybe.

Eli: Haha!

Sadik: What are you laughing at?

Eli: At my friend Avanti,* nothing to do with you.

Sadik: If there were no devils, why didn't you stay there longer to make a survey?

Eli: I'm a man, not a horse.

Sadik: If men can't stay there, how can horses graze there?

Eli: All right, that's your first reason. What else?

*A witty and rather ludicrous character in Uighur folk legend. Eli is poking fun at Sadik here.

Sadik: Second reason: The mares are in poor shape after a lean winter, so they should graze on the plain. Besides, while foaling they need warmth and quiet.

Eli (*interrupting*): But what time of year is it now?

Sadik: Early spring.

Eli: Good, early spring. (*Enlarges eloquently on this.*) It's scientifically stated in manuals on cattle-breeding that early spring is the time when the ice melts, when the river is muddy, grass rots and germs of every kind spread. The climate in Shati is cold, true enough, but that cold wind is just the thing to stop germs from spreading. This is the first reason. Secondly, the mares are tired in spring and need plenty of grass with minerals and vitamins to condition them and provide sufficient nourishment for their foals. The grass in Shati has all the vitamins they need.

Sadik: In fact, a first-class pasture for mares. Right?

Eli: Yes. But the herdsmen never used it. Right? Because they lack scientific knowledge and are too superstitious and conservative. Tell me, my friend, have you made a scientific study of the place?

Sadik: Well....

(*Silence. Sadik sits down by the table with lowered head to think.*)

Eli: Don't try to throw your weight about, my friend.

Sadik (*raising his head*): What do you mean?

Eli: You're only a middle-school graduate. Don't think you're so wonderful just because you've worked longer than us.

(*Silence again. Sadik reflects while Eli sits insolently on the left table watching him. Aman runs in, followed by Kambar, carrying a pack.*)

Aman: Doctor Sadik! Comrade Eli!

Sadik: What's up?

Aman: Trouble in the Shati pasture.

Eli: Oh....

Sadik (*looking up abruptly*): What's happened? (*Urgently*) Go on, tell me.

Eli: Yes, what's happened?

Kambar (*putting down his pack*): Sounds pretty bad. Director Wu wants you both at headquarters at once for an emergency meeting.

Aman: He told us not to let on about this trouble.

Sadik (*quickly*): Why?
Aman: Afraid it may affect the herdsmen's morale.
Sadik (*insistently*): Never mind, tell us.
Kambar (*signalling to Aman*): Tell them.
Aman: All right. The mares at Shati have started miscarrying....
Eli: No? Miscarrying?
Aman: One after another, day and night, no way to stop them. Director Wu wants you to think up some way at once to stop them aborting.
Kambar: On top of that, the weather station has forecast a big cold wave this evening. We must take emergency measures against that.
Eli (*puzzled*): Why should the mares at Shati be miscarrying? How extraordinary. I must find out the details. (*Exit.*)
Sadik (*making a decision*): See here! Tell Director Wu I'm going straight to Shati. (*Turns to fetch medicine and instruments from his cabin.*)
Kambar and **Aman** (*stopping him*): You can't do that.
Kambar: You can't go today, young fellow.
Sadik: Why not?
Kambar: The weather forecast says a hurricane will blow up tonight. Going out in a blizzard would be dangerous.
Sadik: What danger is there? No, uncle, if I don't hurry, all the mares may miscarry.
Aman: The blizzard may sweep you and your horse into a gully. The snow will bury you....
Sadik (*waving this aside*): Nonsense. (*Takes medicine bottles and enters the cabin.*)
Kambar: You can't go, I tell you. You must listen to us, doctor.
Aman: You don't understand, doctor. One year in early spring, one of our Hui camel caravans....
Sadik (*coming out of the cabin*): We're dealing with horses, brother, not camels. Stop arguing. Just go and tell Director Wu.
Kambar: No, this won't do, young fellow.
Aman: Camels and donkeys all fell into the gully....
Sadik (*stopping him*): Those were animals, I'm a man.
Kambar: All right, we'll tell the director for you. You wait. (*Exit.*)

(*Aman, sighing, follows Kambar.*)

Amina (*enters*): Comrade Sadik, Comrade Sadik! (*Tongue-tied*) I'm ever so grateful.
Sadik (*stopping at the door*): Grateful?
Amina (*moved*): Uncle Kasymbek is crying for joy and the herdsmen are slapping their thighs, they're all so pleased. I never knew any foal produce such a strong reaction before.
Sadik: They worked in wind and rain for this foal.
Amina: Yes, it means a lot to them. I don't know how to thank you.
Sadik: It's nothing. Just doing my job.
Amina: You're doing a marvellous job.
Sadik: Only saving one foal.
Amina: No, no! It's more than that. You've not only saved a foal but provided very valuable material for the prevention of still births.
Sadik (*hopefully*): You mean you picked up something useful from this?
Amina (*elatedly*): Yes, it's like a bright lamp shining before my eyes when all around is dark.
Sadik: You're saying that to encourage me. (*Opens the door.*)
Amina: I'm not. Where are you going?
Sadik: Got a job to do.
Amina: Do me a favour, will you? Leave me your notes to study.
Sadik (*putting his satchel on his knee and taking out his notes*): All right. They're all here.
Amina: The science of cattle-feeding, anatomy, ah, all in Chinese, so that's how it is.... Experiments in laparotomy. Who wrote all these?
Sadik: Why, they're my notes. Comrade Amina, please ... please give me your criticisms. Goodbye. (*Exit.*)
Amina: Goodbye. Well, compared with him, I ... I really am a cripple.
Aman (*shouting as he runs in*): Doctor Sadik! Doctor Sadik! Where is he?
Amina: He just left.
Aman: Damn! (*Runs to the tree and waves.*) Doctor Sadik!... (*A horse neighs. Enter Wu Chun followed by Kambar.*)
Aman: There he is. He's just mounted his horse. Look, he's gone.

Kambar (*yelling by the tree*): Sadik! Ah....
Amina (*puzzled*): What's the matter, uncle? Where is he going?
Kambar: He's off to Shati. The mares are miscarrying....
Amina: Oh.... (*Grows more puzzled.*)
Wu (*sitting on the railing and taking off his fur coat*): Aman, take him my fur coat.
Aman: Right.
Wu: And send my hound with him too.
Aman: Right.
Kambar: Go and catch him up.
Amina (*suddenly understanding*): Wait. (*Rushes to the cabin.*)
Wu: Brother Kambar, tell everybody we'll carry on with our meeting to discuss how to cope with this cold wave.
Kambar: Very well. (*Exit with Wu.*)
Amina (*bringing out the rifle*): Please take him this rifle too. Tell him to look after himself.
Aman: Good. (*Takes the gun and runs off.*)

(*Offstage a dog barks and Aman shouts.*)

Eli (*offstage*): Amina, Amina! (*Hurries in and charges up to the table.*) Why did you give him my rifle? (*Bangs the table with his whip.*)

(*Amina exclaims in astonishment. Offstage Aman can be heard shouting in the distance, "Sadik!" The wind howls.*)

CURTAIN

ACT 2

SCENE 2

The third night of the cold spell. The courtyard of the herdsmen's quarters. Night. A high wind is raging, heavy snow is falling, trees and bushes are cracking and groaning. The lantern under the cow-shed eaves is flickering. Wind lashes the snow against the windows and doors. The courtyard is dark except for the lights in the windows of the left and right-hand rooms. A stable collapses, horses whinny, men shout in alarm. Some sounds are distinct, others half blotted out by the wind. Old Kasymbek staggers in from the back with a stick, leaning against the wall.

Kasymbek (*yelling*): The hurricane's here, herdsmen! The hurricane.... (*He rushes down the bridge.*) Bebesh, is Sadik back? Sadik....

(*Enter Bebesh, Kaisha, Kambar and Kulysh.*)

Bebesh: No, dad, Sadik still isn't back.
All: Still not back.
Kasymbek (*shocked*): Ah.... (*Sits down despondently by the table.*)
Kambar: Three days and three nights without any word of him.
Kaisha and **Kulysh**: Heaven protect him!
Kasymbek: This suspense is terrible.
Bebesh: Dad....
Kasymbek: All right, Bebesh, get me my whip. I'll go and find him.
Bebesh and **Kaisha**: Oh. (*Bebesh steps back.*) No, no....
Kambar and **Kulysh** (*worried*): No, you mustn't think of going.
Kambar: The director has already sent horsemen out to search. You mustn't go, Kasymbek.
Kasymbek: The wind's blown the roof off one stable. The horses have stampeded.
Kambar: Ah.
Kasymbek: What use is "Ah"? The horses have stampeded.
Kambar: I'll go. (*Quickly takes ropes from the wall. Exit.*)
Kulysh: This is a fearful snowstorm and you're an old man....
Kasymbek: Well, the foals are neighing for cold, why don't you have a look at them?
Kulysh: All right, I will. (*Exit.*)
Bebesh (*bringing out a saddle*): Dad, I'm afraid....
Kasymbek (*taking the saddle*): Don't worry. Go to the cow-shed and make sure your calf isn't freezing.
Bebesh: Yes, I'll just get a light. (*Runs to the back of the cow-shed.*)
Kaisha (*bringing out a whip and gaiters*): Take my advice and wait till dawn.
Kasymbek (*taking the gaiters*): You're one of the stockmen. The fodder's blowing in all directions, what are you doing about it?
Kulysh (*coming out with a lantern*): Come on, sister.
Kaisha: What a wicked storm. (*Exit with Kulysh.*)

(*Kasymbek puts one foot on a stool to fasten his gaiters.*)

Eli (*in the left room*): You can't go out now, Amina. Listen....

Amina: No, I must.

Eli: Listen to me, Amina.

Kasymbek (*looking at the window*): Young people, this blizzard is breaking our hearts. How can you stay indoors?

Eli (*coming out to explain*): You must excuse us, old brigade leader. We're doing research work.

Kasymbek: Well, Amina may be a swallow afraid of the storm. Are you a pigeon that can't leave its nest?

Eli (*earnestly*): What an idea! But I've got to hurry and write out the results of my survey of new pastures to take back to college. Besides, if the horses have stampeded and the foals are frozen, what good could we do by going?

Kasymbek: You could at least hold a foal each and keep them warm.

Eli: But Comrade Amina is doing research on intussusception and she's not feeling well. I must keep her company.

Kasymbek (*patting his gaiters*): All right, keep her company. I think you've a disease of your own that needs to be cured. (*Exit, carrying a saddle.*)

Eli: What manners! Imagine, that fellow's a model worker.

Amina (*coming out, pulling on her fur jacket and shawl*): Let's go.

Eli (*stopping her at the door*): No, Amina, you mustn't. This is a fearful storm. What if you ran into danger?

Amina: It's all right. We can at least protect the stables and make a fire to warm the foals.

Eli (*stopping her*): There are herdsmen in charge there. Why risk your life in this storm? I'd be worried stiff for you.

Amina: Really, it's all right. Even the women have gone. Didn't you hear them?

Eli: They're country people, born on the grassland and used to snow and ice. You're different.

Amina: What nonsense. I can't always be a swallow afraid of wind and rain.

Eli: Even if you were a mountain eagle, you couldn't go out in this storm. Just think, suppose you met some horses stampeding or fell into a gully hidden by the snow? If anything happened to you, what should I do? (*Earnestly*) You must take care of yourself. You're doing important scientific work.

Amina (*bewildered*): What's come over you? Why are you behaving like this? Really!

Eli (*pleadingly*): Amina.... (*Pushes her into the room and closes the door.*)

(*The sound of galloping hooves. Wu Chun appears covered with snow, two dogskin rugs over his shoulder. He is carrying a whip and electric torch.*)

Bebesh (*emerging from behind the cow-shed with firewood*): Director Wu.

Wu: Has Comrade Sadik come back?

Bebesh: No. Dad's gone to look for him.

Wu: Hmm. (*Worried*) That old man.... What shall we do? Well, get on with your work.

Bebesh: Yes. (*Enters the cow-shed.*)

Wu (*walks over the bridge and comes to the window to telephone. The storm abates slightly*): Hullo, hullo. Give me Tienshan Commune's No. 1 Brigade. Get Brigade Leader Bukara. That you, Bukara? Listen, this is serious. We need your help. The day before the storm started, Comrade Sadik from our farm went to Shati to see about some mares who were miscarrying. That was three days ago and he still isn't back. Has he by any chance gone to your place? No? Comrade Bukara, you must help us find him. I'm afraid he may have lost his way. He may be in danger.

Amina (*rushing out*): What, director? You think Comrade Sadik may have had an accident?

Wu: Hard to say. The snow has hidden all the mountain paths and gullies.

Amina: Oh ... Heaven.... (*She retreats to the table, dazed.*)

(*Enter Eli.*)

Eli (*reproachfully*): You see. And you were insisting....

Wu: Hullo.... Damn. The wire must have broken. (*Puts down the receiver.*) Comrade Amina, Eli, I've brought you these two rugs from the office. Put them on your beds.

Amina: Oh, no, director, we don't need them. Let some other comrades have them.

Wu: Go on, take them. In this storm you'll be chilly by the later half of the night. You need a good rest.

Eli (*taking the skins*): Thanks, Director Wu.

Wu (*producing a hot-water bottle*): Here's a hot-water bottle for you.

Amina: Director....
Wu: Orders are orders, lass.
Amina (*touched*): Director....
Wu: Another thing. Some of the horses that stampeded tonight may be hurt. When the herdsmen bring them back, will you help see to them?
Amina (*taking the hot-water bottle*): Of course.
Eli: Thank you, director.
Wu (*turning to him*): Comrade Eli, let me remind you, this trouble at Shati is extremely serious. It affects the morale of everybody here. Although we've not yet decided whom to hold responsible, I hope you'll consider the matter seriously and examine your own motives.
Eli: I have been considering it. I still am.
Wu: Good. Then you'd better turn in. It's cold out here. I must go to find Sadik. (*Exit.*)

(*The wind howls. Amina, holding the hot-water bottle, leans gloomily on the table deep in thought.*)

Eli (*having seen Wu to the bridge, turns indignantly*): See, before even working out the cause of these miscarriages, they want me to make a self-criticism. I don't see what I have to criticize myself for. (*He turns to go in.*)
Amina: I do. (*Thinking hard, she clasps the hot-water bottle tight.*) Just think of what we've done since coming here. The way we did it....
Eli (*hesitantly*): What? You doubt me too?
Amina: Let's not talk about that now. The immediate problem is to find Comrade Sadik. I still hope....
Eli: You hope I'll go?
Amina: Yes, he's missing because of you. If something happens....
Eli: It's my fault. Right?
Amina: I didn't say that.
Eli: What if I die in the blizzard?
Amina: I'll take the blame.
Eli (*angrily*): How heartless you are!

(*The stage turns dark.*)
(*The wind and snow stop. The night is very quiet. The moon is bright over the distant mountains. Snow covers the boundless plain. Amina wrapped in a shawl sits quietly by the table in the courtyard, one hand on her forehead. Much of the snow on the table has melted. As she is thinking and waiting, galloping hooves are heard.*)

Bebesh (*quietly coming out of the house*): Sister Amina, it's late. It's cold outside. You'd better turn in.
Amina (*stirring*): I'm all right. The herdsmen are tending the horses that were hurt. I shall wait.
Bebesh (*patting her shoulder*): Do go to sleep. I'll wait. I'll be here to make tea for them. (*Pauses anxiously.*) But ... I'm worried, waiting....
Amina: What's worrying you?
Bebesh: I'm afraid.
Amina: Of what?
Bebesh: I'm afraid ... (*turns to the door*) something may have happened to Sadik.
Amina (*turning*): I'm sure it hasn't. You're an intelligent girl, how old are you?
Bebesh: Not very old. (*Pauses.*) Before, mum taught me to sew, milk cows, make butter, collect manure and fodder.... Then when she learned from dad how to feed the cows, she taught me too. But after Comrade Sadik came, he told me all kinds of things, and somehow I liked learning from him. But what's the use? I'd better stick to milking, don't you think?
Amina: Yes.... No. You should learn from Sadik too. You already know how to feed cows. How good it will be when you're a vet too like your father.
Bebesh: Could I go to the mountains then to do disease prevention work?
Amina: Why not? Of course.
Eli (*rushes out at the end of his patience*): That's enough! Aren't you afraid you'll catch cold sitting there?

(*Bebesh slips into her room.*)

Amina (*calmly*): No, I'm not afraid.
Eli: The night's half gone.
Amina: I shall wait for the dawn.
Eli: But it's freezing out here.
Amina: I'm quite warm.

Eli: With only a hot-water bottle?
Amina: It warms my heart.

(Silence.)

Eli: You're too emotional. Like the weather here. *(Pauses.)* You know they're all country folk, used to ice and snow. They can sleep soundly in a snowstorm so long as they're out of the wind. But you're different. I just can't understand why you're waiting so stubbornly too for the big man's return.
Amina: So that I can learn from him.
Eli: What can you learn from him? Learn to stay all the time in the mountains dissecting horses, giving injections, letting blood — all those countrified methods?
Amina: I've a whole lot to learn from him.
Eli *(losing his temper)*: You're saying that to provoke me.
Amina *(standing up calmly)*: Yes. *(Passionately)* You crack your whip so hard . . . lashing at my heart.

(A long silence.)

Eli *(penitently)*: Amina. . . .
Amina *(ignoring him and trying to keep calm)*: For two years I've been like a woman veiled in the old style, seeing you through a veil.
Eli: What are you talking about, Amina?
Amina: . . . But that afternoon . . . the wind suddenly blew the veil away.
Eli: You think I've changed so much?
Amina: Yes, in that moment.
Eli: I was too hasty.
Amina *(sadly)*: I could hardly believe that the stranger standing before me red with fury, with eyes like daggers, was you. The intelligent, well-read university student to whom I was engaged.
Eli: Amina . . . forgive me . . . I was carried away. I didn't mind your giving him my friend's rifle, of course not. I was disgusted by his foul behaviour.
Amina: What is it about Sadik that you hate? He's spending three days and three nights out in this appalling blizzard. If anything happens to him. . . . *(Pauses.)* This very moment he may be trudging through the snow. What does he do it for?

Eli: To show off, I'd say. To show the leadership what a fine fellow he is.
Amina: Sadik?
Eli: Yes. Because he's been working for some time, he looks down on college students like us coming here for practical training.
Amina: You say this about him?
Eli: Yes. So I can't understand why you should worry about him when he's just showing off. And you want me. . . .
Amina: Yes, I'm worried in case he gets lost. But what worries me even more is the real reason for those mares aborting in Shati. It's like. . . .
Eli *(coming to the table)*: What? Don't tell me you agree with the rest of them and think it's because of my survey?
Amina: It's like a thick mist before my eyes.
Eli: Oh? So my ability is like a mist?
Amina: I have a dreadful premonition. . . .
Eli: I have a premonition too. *(Leaves the table.)* No. *(Coldly)* Something more substantial.
Amina: What is it?
Eli: You're in love with him again.
Amina: Oh!
Eli: It's a very unhealthy infatuation. You're having an affair with him on the sly.
Amina: What a dirty mind you have! *(Covers her face and runs away, crying.)*
Eli *(immediately repenting)*: Amina. . . . Damn. *(Leans remorsefully against the door.)* Amina, Amina! *(Runs after her.)* Amina.

(From the nearby stable comes the sound of Kambar singing softly. Then silence. A dog barks out in the snow. Enter Kasymbek with icicles on his beard and thick frost on his fur cap. He staggers in carrying Sadik on his back.)

Kasymbek *(hoarsely)*: Bebesh. . . . Bebesh.
Bebesh *(running out)*: Dad, dad! Sadik! Oh, mum, Sadik is back.
Kasymbek: Quick, open the door.

(Bebesh and Kaisha quickly open the door and Kasymbek carries Sadik inside. Kulysh and some herdsmen come out to see them. Kulysh goes to the window to look at Sadik, then goes back. A herdsman cries,

"Sadik! Sadik is back." Kulysh stops him and they whisper by the steps. Enter Kaisha with a basin.)

Kulysh: How is he, sister?

Kaisha: All right, just numb with cold. When I've rubbed him with snow he'll be better. (*Exit.*)

(Kulysh goes to find something to warm Sadik. The herdsman wants to look through the window but Kaisha stops him. The herdsman goes off. Enter Wu.)

Wu: Kasymbek, Bebesh.

(Kasymbek opens the door.)

Wu: You found him? (*He wants to go in.*)

Kasymbek (*stopping him*): I found him. Don't go in. We might disturb him. (*Pulls him to sit by the table.*)

Wu: Well, I sent several men out to look for you. I'd just crossed that ridge when I heard my dog barking. Then I turned my horse back.

Kasymbek (*sighing and shaking his head*): Well, director, I didn't know where to start looking for him in this vast grassland. I galloped round and round, shouting, but the only answer I got was the wind wailing like a camel. Then suddenly above the howling of the wind I heard a shot and some barks. I went over and found your dog at the foot of a high cliff, where Sadik was lying. By this time a young fellow from Tienshan Commune had come up and he told me Sadik's horse had rolled down the slope. Apparently your dog pulled Sadik by his jacket under the cliff.

Wu: How is he?

Kasymbek: It's not serious. He's frozen stiff. They're chafing him. Once he warms up he'll come to.

Wu: What about those mares in Shati?

Kasymbek: The miscarriages have stopped. As soon as Sadik got there he helped the herdsmen of the No. 2 Team to move the whole lot away to the mountain valley.

Wu: Ah, that's fine. (*Stands up, eager to go and see Sadik.*)

Kasymbek: Don't disturb him, director.

Wu: Don't worry. I'll peep through the window. (*Goes to the window and softly opens it to look inside, then softly closes it.*) Splendid.

Our only worry now is Comrade Sadik.... You know, this is the busy season, delivering horses, mating them, examining them for disease. And we're short-handed. Communes from all over the country — Honan, Kansu, Peking and Inner Mongolia — have sent to buy horses from us. We're frantically busy.

Kasymbek: In that case why did you let Maira keep bees? Allowing her to do whatever she pleased. I know you feel you have to be specially considerate to folk from national minorities. But you're wrong. To break in a colt you have to use a rope.

Wu: That's the way to break in horses, not human beings. Besides, Maira did go to Tienshan Commune to help vet their cattle. We must have faith in the influence of our new society and faith in the young people's political consciousness.

Kasymbek: Well, I shall never have any faith in that college student. I must ask him a few questions. (*Starts towards Eli's room.*)

Wu: What do you want to ask him?

Kasymbek: How the mares came to abort in the pasture he chose.

Wu: I came here to discuss that with you, brother. Let's think of a way to help that young fellow.

Kasymbek: Do you think I haven't helped him? I just don't know what goes on in that mind of his. I must get hold of him.

Wu (*stopping him*): No hurry, Kasymbek. Come to my place and I'll give you some hot tea to warm you up and drive away the chill. We can have a good talk.

Kasymbek: Even if you scald me, you won't melt that ice in my heart.

Wu: We'll drink tea and have a chat. (*Exeunt.*)

(Silence. Then Bebesh cries offstage: "Sadik has come to! Don't get up, you must rest." Sadik gets up and opens the window. Though he has only just come round, he feels full of energy. Eager to recover his strength quickly, he takes a deep breath by the window and tells Bebesh, "I'm all right.")

Sadik: It's nearly dawn. I'll sit outside for a bit.

(Bebesh helps him slowly out.)

Sadik: Tell me honestly, Bebesh. Did this storm do much damage?

Bebesh: None at all, really. We were all frantic. Dad kept shouting, "Look after your calves.... Mend the stable roof.... See

to your foals." Well, everything was saved. Only a few of the horses got some cuts and bruises.

Sadik: Ah.

Bebesh: Do go back in and rest.

Sadik: No, I'll feel better after I've moved about a bit. (*He strolls up and down and does some exercises.*) You see....

Bebesh: Good, I'll boil some tea for you. (*Exit.*)

(*Presently Sadik sits on the steps. Enter Amina. She walks to the slope to look out for his return.*)

Sadik: Comrade Amina.

Amina (*turning in surprise*): Why, Sadik!

Sadik: You don't recognize me again?

Amina: No, no, we were all so worried for fear you might be lost. I've never seen such a snowstorm in all my life.

Sadik: They're very common in the mountains. It was lucky that Uncle Kasymbek found me. Thanks to Director Wu's dog and your rifle too.

Amina: What exactly happened?

Sadik: Nothing much. I fell off the horse, fired a shot, and then lost consciousness.

Amina: Were you hurt?

Sadik: No, not at all. Look, it's nearly dawn, why haven't you gone to bed? Have you been watching with the others?

Amina: No, I was helping the herdsmen with the horses. There are some casualties I don't know how to treat. And do tell me about those miscarriages in Shati. I do hate myself for being so helpless.

Sadik: Even if you knew how to cope, you couldn't go there.

Amina: Why not?

(*Enter Kambar with his dumbra and two herdsmen.*)

Kambar (*surprised*): Sadik!

Two Herdsmen: Sadik!

Sadik: Uncle Kambar.

Kambar: Ha! (*Beaming*) So my eagle is back.

Herdsmen: You're back.

Sadik: That's right. (*Shakes hands with them.*) All right, let's go. (*Turns to his cabin.*)

Kambar: Go? Where?

Sadik: To see to the horses. Bebesh, bring me my medicine chest and overalls, will you?

(*Amina goes inside.*)

(*Bebesh answers offstage, "Coming."*)

Kambar and Herdsmen: What do you want your overalls for? The horses are all right. You need a rest.

Sadik: I want to see the ones that were hurt.

Kambar: There aren't any. We were just watching through the night.

Herdsmen: That's how it was.

Sadik: Haha, don't try to fool me, uncle. Bebesh has told me, you don't know what to do for some of the horses.

Kambar: No, you can't go. It's not dawn yet. You must rest.

Sadik: Come on. (*Takes up his medicine case.*) Let's go. How can I rest?

(*Kambar and the herdsmen try to stop him.*)

Kambar: No, you don't. If the director hears of this we'll catch it.

Sadik (*impatiently*): Catch it for what? Disease prevention workers are sentries guarding the horses. Germs are the enemy. If the germs will rest, uncle, so will I. (*Silence. Kambar and the herdsmen withdraw, grinning. Enter Amina in overalls.*)

Amina: Can I come with you, Comrade Sadik?

Sadik: Of course, that's fine. Come on.

Amina: Let me carry that. (*Takes Sadik's case.*)

(*Bebesh watches them go off to the stables. Eli comes out and watches them leave.*)

CURTAIN

ACT 2

SCENE 3

The next day at noon. Before the mares' stables.

The snow in the plains is melting, revealing fresh green grass. Clouds rise from the valley and cling to the mountain tops, but the sky is clear and blue, the

sun hotter than ever. The tables outside both sheds are covered with oil-cloths and white sheets, with instruments and medicine stacked neatly on them. Kulysh is mending the stable door. Kambar runs in cheerfully.

Kambar: Kulysh, my darling.
Kulysh: What's come over you today?
Kambar: All the results are negative.
Kulysh: What does negative mean?
Kambar: Negative means they're all healthy, all healthy.
Kulysh: Oh, you mean our horses....
Kambar: Of course. In our first batch of horses tested, there's not a single sick one. They're completely up to standard in build and weight. All completely up to standard.
Kulysh: That's wonderful. Then this year we shall have a fine harvest.

(*Kaisha and Bebesh come out of the stable.*)

Kaisha: Heaven! Heaven be praised. Our foals are so frisky and lively.
Bebesh: There you go, mum, talking about Heaven again. Amina says it's everybody's enthusiasm.
Kaisha: That's right. My, that big storm last night nearly tore my heart to shreds. Kasymbek was frantic. "Your fodder's blowing away. The foals are freezing!" How he went on! (*Laughs.*) I thought we were in for big trouble. Heaven be praised.
Bebesh (*reminding her again*)**:** Mum.
Kaisha: All right, thanks to everybody's enthusiasm, only a few horses were hurt.
Bebesh: And even those few were saved by Sadik.
Kaisha: Kasymbek says Sadik has been working non-stop ever since he came round. The old man says he must have a good rest at noon.
Kambar: Yes.
Kaisha: I'll go and make some tea.
Kulysh: I'll prepare some dumplings.
Bebesh: It's no use. I told him several times to rest. He just says, "Little sister, don't worry, I'm busy." What can we do if he refuses to rest?
Kambar: I know what. (*He whispers to the others.*)

Bebesh: Ah.
Kulysh: Hmm.
Kaisha: Good.

(*Kambar goes to fetch Sadik while Bebesh and the two women prepare tea. Soon Sadik is pushed along by Kambar, Aman and some other herdsmen.*)

Bebesh: Here he is. Sadik, you must dance.
Sadik: Me, dance? You others go ahead, I can't dance. Where is Uncle Kasymbek?
Kaisha: I'll fetch him. (*Exit.*)

(*Sadik gesticulates, declining to dance. Just then Kaisha runs in.*)

Kaisha (*perspiring*)**:** Sadik! (*Looks on the verge of tears.*)
Sadik: What's the matter, auntie?

(*Kaisha whispers to Sadik.*)

Sadik: You get the cart ready. I'll come at once. (*Exit.*)
Kambar: What's up. (*Kaisha tells him as they leave together.*)
Bebesh: Still no rest for him.
Kulysh: Let's clear up. (*They clear away the tea things and go out.*)

(*Enter Amina carrying a tray.*)

Eli (*with a raincoat over his shoulder, comes in mopping his forehead*)**:** Amina, it's so close it's sure to rain soon. I've brought your raincoat.
Amina: I don't need it. (*Goes to the right-hand table to put instruments in the sterilizer.*)
Eli: Amina.
Amina: Don't bother me now, I'm busy.
Eli: Amina, Comrade Wu Chun had a talk with me.
Amina: What happened?
Eli: I told him I'd accept his criticism, though there are some things I haven't got clear yet. Then he advised me to see that our relationship was on the right footing, because this is very important.... (*Earnestly*) We've got to have a good talk. You must forgive me.
Amina: I can't discuss it now. Look how busy everybody is, like horses yoked to the plough and going all out.
Eli: And I'm like a mosquito pestering you?

Amina: More like a gad-fly. (*Dries her hands and goes into the left-hand shed.*)

Eli (*stopping her*): Never mind what I am, mosquito, gad-fly or stable-fly, I must look after you.

Amina: I'm not disabled. Why should you look after me?

Eli: You're a girl, not suited to this checking up on horses. Examining those with glanders is specially dangerous.

Amina: There's no blizzard raging now, no ice or snow....

Eli: But your situation here is a hundred times more dangerous. Don't you realize you've never done this test before?

Amina: That's why I'm learning it from Comrade Sadik. (*Tries to go in.*)

Eli (*barring the way*): Amina, consider the conditions here. What disinfectants are there? Horses are wild. When they see your instruments they may start sneezing all over the place. What if one horse has germs in its nose and you get infected? Remember the case of that fascist bacteriologist during the War of Resistance Against Japan who contracted this disease and committed suicide because all his knowledge of modern science couldn't save him?

Amina: Served him right if he was a fascist.

Eli: All right, he deserved it. Then what about the Soviet scientist Vishnevsky? Didn't he die because of this germ? Don't you remember those cases?

Amina (*indignantly*): No, I haven't studied as well as you. I don't.

(*Silence. Amina enters the shed. Eli leans disconsolately on the table. A pause. Amina brings out another tray of instruments.*)

Eli (*turning to stop her*): Amina, why should I do all this?

Amina (*turning coldly away*): Who knows?

Eli (*with emotion*): It's for your sake. I love you.... All my study and work are for you. Forgive me for hurting your feelings last night. (*Sobs.*)

Amina (*touched*): But ... think first what's happening to you.

Eli: I do. Sadik may have his theory and analysis, but I have scientific knowledge of cattle-breeding. In the troubled waters of this struggle between us you'll see which is bright gold and which is mud.

Amina (*doubtfully shaking her head*): It's hard.... (*Lowers her head and starts off.*)

Eli (*stopping her*): Amina, listen to me.

Amina (*calmly*): Let me go.

Eli: No. Help with deliveries if you like; but don't examine horses for glanders. (*Seizes the tray in her hands.*)

Amina: Well!... Is that how you've accepted Director Wu's criticism?

Eli: I want to protect you. I love you, understand?

Amina (*tugging at the tray in desperation*): You love me, you love me, you love me — for what? (*On the verge of tears.*)

Eli (*tugging at the tray too*): I love you for your intelligence, your beauty, your charm. I can't live without you. You are my oriole, my dove, the prettiest flower of the college....

Amina: Oh! (*She feels grossly insulted.*)

Eli: You are the red rose in my garden, the fragrant concubine Iparhan* of my heart....

Amina (*goaded beyond endurance*): What! Your fragrant concubine? (*Pushes him away, seizes the tray and runs off miserably.*)

(*Thunder. Eli covers his face with one hand, pauses, wondering whether to go after her. Enter Sadik in haste with his medicine case, mopping his forehead.*)

Eli (*as if nothing had happened*): My friend, you're the man I want.

Sadik: Oh, yes, we must have a good talk about what happened in Shati. But I'm very busy now.

Eli: Even a busy man on a fast horse can pluck flowers as he goes.

Sadik: Not I. We have to hurry to examine the plough-horses. Can't have them leaving with glanders or other diseases. (*Enter Kasymbek.*) One of the old brigade leader's Orlov horses has contracted acute splenic fever. I must go and give it an injection at once.

Kasymbek: Yes, hurry, Sadik. I'm off to see Director Wu.

Eli: That's simple. One injection of anthrax serum will do the trick. If you're too busy, I'll do it for you.

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*The wife of a Uighur chief in Sinkiang in the eighteenth century. When Emperor Chien-lung sent an expedition there she was captured and became the emperor's concubine. Later she committed suicide.

Sadik: Well.

Herdsman (*running in*): Comrade Sadik, the second batch of horses is ready, waiting for you.

Sadik: All right, I'm coming.

Eli: Don't you trust me?

Sadik: What a thing to say. All right, you help me with the injection. I'll get the drug. (*Enters the shed and comes out presently with a bottle.*)

Eli: But we must have a talk. You know the pasture I found. (*Takes out a wine flask.*) We can talk as we drink. Wine prevents chills and helps conversation.

Sadik: Sorry, I never touch alcohol. It's not good to drink while you're working.

Eli: Are you dictating to me?

Sadik: Not dictating, offering some friendly adivce.

Eli: All right, all right. What else? Speak out.

Sadik: I can't discuss things now. They're waiting for me.

Eli: You refuse to give advice when asked?

Sadik: How can you say that? You must be joking. (*Gives the bottle to Eli.*) Here's 200 c.c. of anthrax serum.

Eli: I'll go and do the injection.

Sadik: Good.

(*Exit Sadik. Eli sees him off, then puts the bottle on the table and sits down. Enter Kasymbek. He wants to talk to Eli but doesn't know how to start.*)

Eli: Brigade leader. (*Picks up the medicine case and starts off.*)

Kasymbek: Ah, young man . . . wait.

Eli (*surprised, coming back*): Yes, brigade leader?

Kasymbek (*trying hard to control his temper*): I want to ask you this: How did those miscarriages in Shati come about?

Eli: You can't blame the pasture I chose. But it's a very complicated question, difficult to explain simply.

Kasymbek (*insistently*): If you're honest you can explain it all right. Well, let me ask you this. Do you know that, since ancient times, snowstorms in spring have been like a knife killing us Kazakhs?

Eli: Of course I know. (*Stepping back and laying one hand on his chest to show respect and humour the old man.*) I know how you feel about

it. You are a hero with medals, an eagle of the grassland. You have flown over Tienshan to distant Peking.

Kasymbek: Bah.... Yes, I wear a gold medal given me by the Communist Party. It shines day and night like a gleaming red star on my chest. But, young fellow, these last few days I've been too ashamed to wear it. Do you know why?

Eli: Why, my dear and respected father?

Kasymbek (*angrily*): Because of your carelessness! You sabotaged our work. You....

(*Enter Amina with an empty tray. Hearing this argument, she listens by the window of the shed.*)

Eli: No, no, uncle. You're being very unjust. The miscarriages in Shati were obviously caused by germs brought in by the mares of No. 2 Team from outside. The herding ground I chose had nothing to do with it.

(*Enter Wu with a raincoat and whip. He stops under the tree.*)

Wu: I don't think you can jump to that conclusion.

Eli: Director Wu!

Wu (*pauses, then comes to the table*): Comrade Sadik has made a very careful examination of all the pastures we use. We have detailed records. No miscarriages were ever caused by such germs. To my mind, this trouble in Shati came about owing to your casual survey, because you were afraid of hardships and cold.

Eli: What grounds have you for saying this, director?

Wu: The weather there is most unstable with extreme changes of temperature several times a day.

Eli: So according to you the miscarriages were due to cold?

Wu: Yes.

Eli: Whose idea was that?

Wu: Comrade Sadik's.

Eli: Ridiculous! I simply can't believe it of a technical school graduate. How could cold make mares abort? Uncle, listen....

Wu: Calm down, Comrade Eli, and think it over coolly. Because you moved those mares to Shati without permission, you caused this loss for the state. The situation is quite clear. It's up to you to make a serious self-criticism instead of trying to brazen things out and shirking responsibility in this irresponsible man-

ner. If you go on like this, it will be very bad for you. (*Pauses.*) Come, sit down. Mares in foal are particularly sensitive to outside conditions. Agreed? So any careless treatment, any fodder that has ice or frost on it, not to mention a cold spell and hurricane, will make them miscarry. You must have read of many such cases in your manuals of cattle-breeding.

Eli: It depends how cold it is, how serious the storm.

Wu: It was a ten-degree hurricane.

Eli: How many degrees below zero?

Wu: 42.

Eli (*leaning forward*): Who took these measurements?

Wu: Comrade Sadik.

Eli: Ah....

Wu: He took a thermometer and groped his way about in the blizzard for one whole night.

Eli: Impossible. At 42 degrees below zero all but the strongest cattle would freeze to death. Yet Sadik....

Wu: Is still alive, yes. (*Takes out a notebook and reads calmly and forcefully.*) On the lower slopes 37.5 degrees below zero, middle slopes 40 degrees, upper slopes 42.5 degrees. Here is the record. Look.

Eli (*shocked*): Oh.... (*Starts looking through the record on the table.*)

Kasymbek (*indignantly*): So....

Eli (*picking up the notebook*): Oh, no, Director Wu, Uncle Kasymbek. This is quite impossible. Not even birds and beasts could live through a snowstorm 42.5 degrees below zero. Sadik....

Wu: Sadik is a Communist, a real young man of our new age.

Kasymbek: A grand young man. But you? You really disgust us.... Pah! (*Exit.*)

Wu: I know this has given rise to a misunderstanding between you and Sadik.

Eli: No, there's no misunderstanding.

Wu: I didn't want to show you these figures, but each time I spoke to you you were too cocksure. Think it over carefully, will you? (*Walking away, Wu Chun sees Amina who has seen and heard everything. She means to slip away but he stops her, pointing to Eli, indicating that she should talk to him. Exit Wu.*)

(*Thunder rumbles. Eli sits down dejectedly at the table, listlessly resting his head between his hands. It begins to rain in the mountains.*)

Amina (*clasping the tray to her breast in distress, approaches*): Eli.... (*Runs to the table and sits beside him, very stirred.*) Don't... don't lose heart, just think things over calmly. In the past I always thought I understood you as well as I did myself. (*Thinking back*) You were so passionate, like a fiddle playing passionate music, when you told me all your beautiful ideals. You were longing to breathe life into the Tarim Desert and make it green.... I thought you were pure gold. But since coming to the country I've been more and more disappointed in you. Sometimes you're as cold as iron, sometimes spineless as mist. You don't know how it's upset me. (*Sadly*) But I still have faith in you. I remember you once told me, "A bird must have wings, a man must have ideals." You're well educated and you have high ideals; this means you haven't lost your wings. We may be pigeons today, but tomorrow we could become swans and finally be steeled into eagles, not only flying in the clear sky but able to brave snowstorms and bitter cold. Yes, this isn't an empty dream. I'm sure, though you've made a mistake, you won't persist on the wrong path. Am I right, Eli? What do you think?

(*Eli hangs his head like a defeated bull, then turns to pick up the medicine case and slinks off.*)

Amina: Eli, Eli....

(*A clap of thunder. Lightning flashes on the distant mountains. Amina hears someone coming. She tries to be calm, quickly puts the sterilized instruments on the tray and takes it away.*)

(*Enter Sadik hastily, jotting down notes and shouting: "Please get the third batch of horses ready for examination." He goes up to the table, writing fast. Peals of thunder. Bebesh hurries in with tea and food.*)

Bebesh: I've brought your raincoat, Sadik. The rain's coming over the mountain.

Sadik: Thanks, little sister. Have you finished the book I gave you?

Bebesh: Yes.

Sadik: I have more.

Bebesh: More books for me?

Sadik: Yes.

Bebesh: The book says after calves have had their milk they should exercise in the shed. Why not outside on the grass?

Sadik: Well.... (*Still writing rapidly*) Well, there are reasons. Let's study this problem after I'm through with my work.

Bebesh (*standing up cheerfully*): You like to study problems with me?

Sadik: Yes, very much. As soon as I've time we'll make a thorough study of this problem.

Bebesh (*excitedly*): A thorough study? That's hard....

Sadik (*looking up in surprise*): Why?

Bebesh: You're busy now. So go on with your work. I'm off.

Sadik (*beaming*): Thank you.

Bebesh: That's all right. (*Exit.*)

(*Thunder rumbles. The rain is approaching.*)

Amina (*carrying instruments runs in with two herdsmen*): Comrade Sadik, there's going to be a downpour. Do we carry on with the examination?

Sadik (*looking up at the sky*): Yes, of course.

Amina: There's no light.

Sadik: Take the horses to the stables.

Amina: It's even darker there.

Sadik: We can use lanterns and electric torches.

Amina: Wouldn't it be better to put it off till tomorrow when it clears up?

Sadik: No, we can't wait. The rain won't last long.

Kaisha (*running in anxiously*): Oh, this is terrible, Sadik.

Sadik (*surprised*): What's wrong?

Kaisha: My darling horse, the Orlov, has collapsed.

Sadik (*shocked*): No....

Amina (*concerned*): What happened?

Sadik (*jumping up*): Didn't Comrade Eli give it an injection?

Kaisha: Yes, he did.

Amina: Uncles, take that Orlov horse to the stable at once. I'll come. (*Catches hold of Kaisha.*) Auntie, did Eli give the injection?

(*Exeunt the two herdsmen.*)

Kaisha: Yes, Eli.

Amina: Hmm.... (*Sits by the table in a daze, putting her hands to her head.*)

Sadik (*rushing out of the shed with the prescription*): 200 c.c. of anthrax serum. Nothing wrong here.

(*Eli hurries in wearing a raincoat with a medicine case on his back.*)

Sadik (*rushing up to him and seizing his arm*): Well, friend?

Eli: Looks very bad.

Sadik: What?

Eli: The horse has collapsed. Can't last long.

Sadik (*scratching his cheek*): What an extraordinary thing.

Eli (*indignantly*): Not extraordinary at all, Mr. Expert. Probably you made the wrong diagnosis in your hurry.

Sadik: That's impossible. (*Turns quickly away.*)

Kaisha: Heaven! (*Follows him.*)

(*Thunder and lightning that illumines the plain. Amina sits pale and dazed by the table without moving. Eli leans indignantly on the railing looking at her. The rain hisses down.*)

Eli: Just see! This great expert, this mighty eagle, how high he soared, looking scornfully down on others as if they were chickens on the ground and deliberately belittling their hard work. (*Rushes to the table.*) And what is the fact of the matter? He couldn't tell whether this stallion had acute splenic fever or some other disease, so he gave the wrong drug. Now do you wonder why he reached that conclusion about the trouble at Shati?

Amina: Are you asking me?

Eli: Yes, you.

Amina: Why should you ask me?

Eli: Why not? I love you. My heart is like the clear stream of Ining, foaming with love for you, yet you regard me as cold iron or a wisp of mist. I want to prove to you, and not only to you but to Director Wu, Kasymbek and the herdsmen in our brigade, that Sadik is no authority at all. His conclusions are invalid. I want to debunk his wrong conclusion about the miscarriages at Shati. Will you support me? Yes or no? Eh?... Why don't you speak?

Amina: I have my doubts....

Eli: What doubts?

Amina: I can't see how anyone so careful and responsible could be so careless....

Eli: You mean you won't back me up?

Amina (*confused*): Wait. Didn't he say that the horse had splenic fever?

Eli: Yes, splenic fever.

Amina: And he prescribed 200 c.c. of anthrax serum?

Eli: Yes, 200 c.c. of anthrax serum.

Amina: All right. (*Turns away.*)

Eli: Wait. Where are you off to? (*Goes to her door.*) No need for you to go. The horse has collapsed. Amina, where are you going?

Amina: To see Director Wu.

(*Peals of thunder, torrents of rain.*)

Eli (*under the eaves to keep out of the rain*): Amina!... (*Retreats into the room.*)

(*Sadik staggers along the muddy path by the birch trees followed by Kasymbek and Kambar.*)

Kasymbek: How about it, Sadik?

Sadik: It definitely is splenic fever. Nothing wrong with the diagnosis. But why was the injection ineffective?

Kasymbek: Yes, that's strange.

Sadik: Most peculiar.

Kambar: It breaks my heart to see it — if only the horse could speak!

Kasymbek: Is there still hope or not? Eh, Sadik?

Kambar: Don't take it so much to heart, old brigade leader.

Kasymbek: I've tended that horse day and night, Kambar, as if it were the apple of my eye. A fine stallion like that in our brigade was more precious to me than gold. It could service twenty-four mares at a time, forty-eight mares in two goes. If forty-six of them foaled and forty-four of the foals lived, think how the strain would have multiplied in ten years and the wealth of fine horses we could have given the state. If it dies, it's a big loss for our country.

Sadik: Don't take on so, uncle. It's my fault for falling down on my job.

Kasymbek: No, I'm the one who's fallen down on the job. We herdsmen in the old society hadn't so much as a pair of boots to wear. Then the Communists came and gave us the strength

to live. They honoured me with their trust, let me raise horses and mules for the state. Then in '59 I was sent from the grasslands to far-off Peking where I saw the man we owe it all to — Chairman Mao. I seized his big hand with both of mine and my heart melted like a snow mountain, tears gushed to my eyes... I was too happy to speak.... Ah, Chairman Mao, you turned this old Kazakh who'd spent all his life in the mountains into someone useful to China. But now ... I've fallen down on my job.

Kambar: Cheer up, old brigade leader. If we really can't save it, forget it.

Kasymbek: No, whatever happens I can't let it die like this. Kambar, go and see to it. Sadik, I'm off to consult a few of the old herdsmen. We'll see if there isn't something else we can do.

Sadik: Right.

(*Exit Kasymbek. Sadik, left alone, feels most worried. Enter Wu Chun and Amina.*)

Wu: Sadik.

Sadik: Director.

Wu: I know. Off you go, Amina. (*Amina leaves.*) An emergency job has come up. You must go straight away.

Sadik: What is it?

Wu: Two horses have fallen ill in Tienshan Commune. Their preliminary diagnosis is intussusception.

Sadik: Intussusception.

Wu: That's right. They haven't much live-stock to start with, and this is sowing time; so we must help them. Comrade Bukara has come himself to fetch you.

Sadik: Right, I'll go.

Wu: Good. We've studied Amina's report on your experiments, and I'm sure you'll pull the operation off this time.

Sadik: Director Wu, about this Orlov horse....

Wu: Amina's told me about it. When such a serious thing happens in our farm, it's not old Kasymbek or you who should feel to blame, I'm the one most responsible. However, at the moment the important thing is not to fix the blame but to find out the cause of the accident. Just now Amina made a good suggestion,

I've agreed she should try it out. You go along to Tienshan Commune first.

Sadik: But Director Wu, this operation is really beyond me.

Wu: Unless we solve it, all our work's jeopardized. You've read this history of our herding here, haven't you?

Sadik: Yes, more than once.

Wu: Think of all the troubles we had in the past, what with intussusception, glanders, mares losing their foals.... If we don't find a solution, they'll hold up our work and stop our development.

(*Sadik nods thoughtfully.*)

Wu: Good. Have some guts, and go quickly. I'm off to the stables. (*Exit.*)

(*Peals of thunder. Torrential rain batters the plain.*)

Sadik (*turning gravely and putting the book on the table*): *The History of Herding....* The pages of this history record all those years of sorrow, when every year thousands and tens of thousands of horses fell victim to strange diseases and the herdsmen were like eagles without wings, their songs were mingled with tears. Now this monstrous intussusception has crept in among our state's herds. For a whole year it's been like a mountain weighing on my heart.... Yes, you hid stubbornly in our horses' bellies and gnawed at my heart. Then you struck me down and sent me to hospital. This time either you'll send me to hospital again or I'll wipe you out from the grasslands. (*Enters the shed.*)

(*Enter Bukara in a felt coat with his whip.*)

Bukara: Comrade Sadik, please hurry. We can't afford to delay. (*Sadik comes out with his case. Bukara takes it from him and they leave.*)

(*The rumble of the cart fades away. Eli runs in.*)

Eli (*looking round*): Amina, Amina! What? Not back yet? (*Realizes he is still carrying the medicine case. He puts it on the table and takes two bottles from his pocket, one empty, the other full. He gives a start.*) What? Anthrax serum? (*Panicking*) Heaven, did I inject the saline instead of the serum? Must have been

because I was confused and that stable was dark. So I gave the wrong injection. It was all because of you, Amina.... I wanted to justify the pasture I chose. But now what shall I do? Damn ... won't this spoil everything?

(*The voices of Wu and Amina offstage. Eli runs away.*)

Wu: Come and have a rest, Comrade Amina. Do you think Comrade Eli really gave an injection?

Amina: Perhaps ... he did.

Wu: What was the injection you gave just now?

Amina: The same: 200 c.c. of anthrax serum.

Wu: Do you think the horse will pull through?

Amina: ... Maybe....

(*Kambar shouts offstage, "It's better!" He rushes in.*)

Kambar: You've saved it. The horse has already got up. It's like a miracle. I must find the old brigade leader.

Wu: Yes, go quickly. Comrade Amina, you've done a wonderful thing.

Amina: I....

Wu: What's come over you?

Amina: I ... I ... I don't know, Director Wu.... (*Falls against his shoulder and sobs.*)

(*Sound of rain. A boy's pure voice is heard singing on the plain.*)

Heavy rain hides the sun from the plain,
Long and endless the muddy roads;
But the moon will shine on the stranger from afar,
Will show good folk the road to happiness....

Wu (*comforting her*): Comrade Amina, saving the horse should make you very happy. Everybody's going to be wild with joy. Listen to that cowherd singing in the pouring rain. Why should you cry?

Amina: It's not for myself.

Wu: I know. Well, have a talk with him.

Amina: There's nothing more to be said between us.

Wu: Don't take it that way. If he's to make progress, we must hope he'll be honest. You should help him to see his mistakes.

Amina: No, Director Wu, you're like a father to me and I'd obey you in everything else. But I must have my own life.

Wu: Of course, that's up to you. But I wasn't thinking of you as his fiancée. After all, you're comrades too.

Amina: .....

Aman (*runs in*): Director Wu, men have come from Peking to buy horses.

Wu: I'm coming. (*Exit Aman.*) All right, I must first have a look at the Orlov horse. (*Exit.*)

Eli (*coming out*): Amina....

Amina (*turning away from him, standing*): Tell me this: Did you give the horse an injection or not?

Eli: Yes, I did. I did.

Amina (*turning suddenly*): What injection?

Eli: The anthrax serum. The serum....

Amina (*pulling off her ear-rings and putting them on the table*): Please leave me alone. (*Exit.*)

(*Eli picks up the ear-rings. A crash of thunder.*)

CURTAIN

ACT 3

The next day. The courtyard of the herdsmen's quarters.

It is dawn. The grassland is entrancingly fresh and green after the rain. Under a bright sun and cloudless sky the pine woods on the distant hills seem wreathes of mist with snowy peaks behind bright as a mirror. The windows on both sides of the courtyard are wide open, and a pot of flowers is in bloom on the right window-sill. The rectangular table in the courtyard is spread with a white cloth and the samovar is boiling. Kaisha, wearing an embroidered shawl, is wiping bowls while Kulysh prepares milk tea.

Kaisha: Green tea and red tea....

Kulysh: Milk tea and samovar tea — we've got everything.

Kaisha: They can drink any kind they please.

Kulysh: Uighur style, Kazakh style....

Kaisha: Or Han style, whichever they choose. We'll make the cakes after they've had tea.

The First Bumper Harvest ▶
(coloured woodcut) by Li Huan-min
About the artist see the article on p. 110.

Kulysh: But the girl in this room and the boy in that have had a meal with Director Wu. I hear they had dumplings.

Kaisha: Does that mean they'll be leaving as soon as they've had tea?

Kulysh: Yes. (*Lowering her voice and pointing at the rooms*) But didn't a letter come from Urumchi telling them to work here for another half year?

Kaisha: Well, that young fellow is pacing his room as frantically as a man treading on thorns. Seems Director Wu told him off, and he insists on leaving. It's lucky for him the horse was saved. Otherwise I wonder what would have happened.

Kulysh: He may as well go. His heart's not with us in the grasslands. But the girl's packed too and her luggage has been taken to the cart. Why do you suppose she wants to go?

Kaisha: That young wretch broke her heart. I asked her several times but she wouldn't say a word. When she first came here she was happy as a lark. To tell the truth, after she saved our Orlov horse I'd gladly have adopted her as my daughter. She and Sadik are both like our own children to us Kazakhs.

Kulysh: Do you think Sadik will succeed this time, sister? I'm so worried.

Kaisha (*anxiously*): So am I. When the girl saved the horse, I felt relieved for my old man; but because of the operations this boy's doing I've had a tick in both eyelids ever since last night, as if two bees were crawling there. Can you see?

Kulysh: Yes, they're both twitching.

Kaisha: I'm so afraid he'll end up in hospital again like last year.

Kulysh (*worried*): If he does....

Kaisha: He may not bring back apples this time, but tears.

Kulysh: I don't believe it. Director Wu is sure he'll pull it off.

(*Amina comes out carrying a case and raincoat.*)

Amina: Aunties. (*Goes off to put her case on the cart, then comes back.*)

Kaisha: Lass! (*Stopping her*) Don't be in such a hurry to leave.

Kulysh: No hurry, no hurry....

Amina: I'm not in any hurry, auntie. I just put my things on the cart.

Kaisha (*placing her hands on Amina's shoulders*): Which cart, child? The one going to the foot of the mountain, or the one going to Red Star Farm?

Amina: Director Wu wants me to go on training with the herds at the foot of the mountain, but I'd rather go further away.

Kaisha: No matter where you go or how far away, mind you forget what I said. (*Earnestly*) Those hard words — you know — during the foaling.

Amina: That was good criticism. I'll always remember it.

Kaisha: No, indeed, you mustn't. You've done such a fine thing. We haven't yet thanked you properly. This morning we've prepared some tea and food, green and red tea and samovar tea.

Kulysh: And cakes afterwards.

Kaisha: You'll feel better once you've eaten and drunk something.

Kulysh: A full stomach helps you to get over your troubles.

Kaisha: The last two days you've been looking sad.

Amina: Please don't talk about it, auntie.

Kaisha: But do listen to us. We were just saying that you're like our own Kazakh children. If the old folk behave badly, their children should forgive them.

Kulysh: And even if honoured guests are in a hurry, they must let their hosts entertain them.

Amina: Auntie....

Kulysh: Yes, you must wait for Sadik, the old brigade leader and Director Wu. Don't leave until after tea.

Amina: All right.

(*Enter Kambar in high spirits with a bag on his shoulder. Three herdsmen follow him.*)

Kaisha (*gaily*): So he's back.

Kulysh: Yes, my Kambar is back.

Herdsmen: How was it, Brother Kambar?

Herdsman A: Was Sadik's operation successful?

Herdsman B: Did you find the old brigade leader?

Amina: What happened, Uncle Kambar?

Kambar (*mopping his face*): Sadik's operations were a success.

All (*overjoyed*): A success!

Kambar: Yes, the whole of Tienshan Commune is wild with joy. (*Counting on his fingers.*) First, because Sadik operated successfully on their farm horses. Secondly, because Maira put a stop to the infectious disease in their cattle team. Thirdly, because we gave them enough live-stock — first-grade cattle too — to help them with their farming. All these things one on top of another have made them so happy they don't know what to do.

Herdsman A: That's easy, they can treat us herdsmen to roast mutton.

Herdsman B: And some drinks.

Herdsman A: Or tea will do.

Kambar: No, they're sending us a red banner, and this autumn they've promised to let us have a hundred thousand catties of fodder.

Kaisha: How does Kasymbek feel?

Kambar: Ah, sister, you want to know about him? (*Starts to dance about and tease the old woman.*) When he heard this, he was so tickled he just laughed and laughed and couldn't get a word out.

(*Kaisha and Kulysh smile at each other.*)

(*Sound of a cart approaching and of singing and music.*)

Kambar: Listen! That's Brigade Leader Bukara's cart bringing gifts to our farm. I've come to tell you that Director Wu wants all of you to go straight to the meeting hall to welcome their delegates, and I'm to play some music to express our thanks. I shall play herdsmen's songs and chants. Come along and listen. Come on quickly. (*Enters the left-hand room.*)

Herdsmen: Good, let's go. (*Exeunt.*)

Kaisha: Wait, I must put on a new shawl.

Kulysh: All right, all right, sister. And later we'll invite them to tea. (*Pulls Kaisha off.*)

Amina: You go along, aunties. I'll see to the tea.

Kaisha and **Kulysh:** That'll be grand. (*Exeunt.*)

(*Sadik comes up the bridge, glowing and freshly shaved, carrying his whip and raincoat. Eli peers at him through his window.*)

Sadik: Amina....

Amina (*turning*): Sadik! (*More calmly*) Congratulations....

Sadik (*running forward to grasp her hands eagerly*): I'm so grateful to you, so grateful! (*With emotion*) If that precious Orlov horse had died, what a terrible loss it would have been for the state and what a great blow to the herdsmen! I can't bear to think of it. I'm so grateful to you.

Amina (*cutting him short*): No, you're the one to be congratulated. None of us had been able to perform that difficult operation, but now you've solved the problem. You've certainly taken a new step in the science of disease prevention. I ... do admire you so.... (*Turns her head away.*)

Sadik: Comrade Amina.

Amina: I feel really ashamed. I've studied science, yet it's still a closed book to me.

Sadik: You're too modest, Amina. What do I know? But when there's a job to be done, who can help worrying about it? Well, this morning's fine sunlight is more precious than gold. I'm off to check the horses we're sending out. But I felt so thrilled I had to come and thank you. (*Amina turns away sadly.*) What's the matter, Comrade Amina?

Amina: Nothing.

Sadik: Is it because of Eli?

Amina: No, because of myself. After coming down here I thought I was working to the best of my ability, but I was taking the wrong path and I only learned it too late.

Sadik: Comrade Eli is intelligent and has a systematic grounding in theory. I'm sure he'll be able to make a fresh start. You must help and encourage him.

(*Bebesh runs out of the house.*)

Bebesh: Sadik, you're back!

Sadik: Yes, I'm back, but I'm going to the mountains again.

Bebesh: What, are you leaving again?

Sadik: Yes, could you get me my padded jacket?

Bebesh: All right. (*Exit.*)

Sadik: I must be going, Comrade Amina. Goodbye.

(*Bebesh brings out the jacket.*)

Sadik: Thanks, little sister. Goodbye. (*To Amina*) Goodbye. (*Exit.*)

Maira (*running in excitedly with her medical case and raincoat*): Amina, Sister Amina!

Amina (*turning*): Maira.

Maira: Ah! (*Rushes forward to embrace her.*) How I've missed you, darling. But I've been thinking of you all the time.

Amina: So you're back.

Maira: Yes, I'm back.

Amina: I was afraid I'd have to leave without seeing you again.

Maira: Are you leaving?

Amina: Yes.

Maira: Where are you going?

Amina: The further the better. To the Altai Mountains or the Pamirs.

Maira: Surely you must be joking. Don't waste time running around when you've just got used to this place. Why not come to the herding grounds with me? I know how uncomfortable you are here....

Amina: No, it isn't that. I do envy you, Maira.

Maira: Envy me?

Amina: You were right. Not to get married before doing well in your work and not even to have a love affair.

Maira (*puzzled*): Why, has he jilted you?

Amina: No, but I've only just learned how to live.

Maira (*spreading her hands*): Then you should be happy. Just now Director Wu treated me to dumplings and read me a little lecture. He said, "In the past you only talked about the importance of disease prevention without working steadily. You only talked about the importance of science without realizing that it has to serve production. That meant you could only be a propagandist, not a scientist." So I've made up my mind to come back, settle down in the mountains and learn from Comrade Sadik. Why don't you stay with us too, and we'll work together.

Amina (*turning delightedly to the table*): You've made up your mind to it?

Maira: Yes.

Amina (*sitting opposite her and gripping her arms*): I can't believe it.

Maira: Ah! (*Pouts.*) If you don't believe me, you don't believe the important lesson I learned working in that commune.

Amina: What was that?

Maira (*her words tumbling over each other*): I've learned a lot. The Party secretary, brigade leader and commune members there all treated me like an expert sent from our farm. They promised to carry out all my orders and instructions — I was so embarrassed! Fact is, there were plenty of difficulties. But the

whole commune, men and women, young and old, helped me to solve them and suggested ways and means. We worked at disease prevention and disinfection, at the same time isolating all sick cattle. After two days of going all out we stopped the disease from spreading.

Amina: Stopped it from spreading?

Maira: And completely stamped it out.

Amina: Wonderful!

Maira: You should have seen what it was like after our victory. One family would invite me to tea, another to roast mutton. They all kept on at me, begging me to stay there. When I told them my ideal was to be an actress, they simply roared with laughter. One said, "An actress queens it on the stage, but on a farm a vet is the popular one. A disease prevention worker is the rose of the grassland, dear to all the herdsmen." Another said, "However sweetly you sing, if we fall down on production we'll all starve."

Amina: Aren't they practical!

Maira: Of course they are. They've such a wonderful spirit. The Party secretary took me to see their ploughing team in the fields, the brigade leader took me to see their herding team. They asked my advice and wanted me to give talks. Oh....

Amina: It was splendid of you.

Maira: What's splendid about me? I've done practically nothing. But when Brigade Leader Bukara brought me back in his cart, he brought a long letter to our director too....

Amina: What did the letter say?

(*Enter Bebesh who watches them. Kaisha and Kulysh come out too.*)

Maira (*giggling*): Never you mind — some nice things.

Amina: What else did you learn?

Maira: This above all — that you haven't lived in vain if you can do something useful for the people.

Amina (*excitedly*): Oh, Maira, let's go to the mountains together. Come on! (*They skip off, singing.*) Goodbye, aunties! (*Exeunt.*)

(*Kasen runs in.*)

Kasen: Good morning!

Kaisha: Kasen!

Kulysh: So you're back, Kasen.

Kaisha: Well, is your mother-in-law better now?

Kasen: Pashahan's mother was never ill. She just wanted an excuse to get me there.

Kaisha: Then why did she let you come back?

Kasen: I found things had changed there. Pashahan's parents are looking after cattle in a commune in the suburb. The old man has charge of twenty farm horses, the old lady of fourteen cows. Their horses and cows were always ailing, and they wanted to see whether I was any good as a vet. Well, I took it in my stride! After three days I had the horses back in the fields and the cows giving milk again.

Kulysh: Then what happened?

Kasen: Then people came every evening to ask me how to cure cattle diseases, and my girl, listening, fairly swelled with pride. As I spoke she took down notes, which the commune had printed as pamphlets to distribute to the herdsmen in each brigade. The commune members said, "One doctors men, the other vets animals. This marriage will keep both men and cattle healthy." And the old lady said, "Ah, you're a capable lad, you've saved our cows and horses." I told her, "Auntie, where I come from there are thousands and tens of thousands of horses. Would it be right for me to quit working there?" She agreed, "It wouldn't do at all." I saw my chance and said, "Didn't you want me to come back to Ining to find some other work, auntie?"

Kulysh: Well, what did she say?

Kasen: She laughed and said, "Don't talk about that now. You're right. When it's time for you to get married, just write to me and I'll send Pashahan to you."

Kaisha: And what did your Pashahan say?

Kasen: She just smiled and fell into her mother's arms. She didn't say anything.

Bebesh: It's time for the meeting, mum.

Kasen: Yes, go on to the meeting, Bebesh. (*The two women leave with Bebesh.*)

(*Enter Eli.*)

Kasen: Well, Eli, how are you, my friend?

Eli: Why have you come back, Kasen? You fool!

Kasen: How can you say that? You're the one who's a fool—you nearly led me astray. You work in our farm but hanker all the time to be back in Ining. What could you achieve there? The day I left you gave me all the wrong advice, urging me to suck up to the old people by playing the hypocrite, calling every other day and doing them all sorts of little favours. That kind of cupboard-love is useless and backward.

Eli: Why is it backward? Don't we want good human relations in our new society?

Kasen: The new society wants young people to be honest. Tell me, friend, were you honest about that injection you gave the Orlov horse?

Eli (*turning pale*): What do you mean?

Kasen (*jokingly, with dramatic gestures*): Friend, out of a thousand horses no two are alike. But without reins or halters they all stay with the herd, and the wild horse had better join the herd too instead of picking roses by the precipice! (*Takes up the rifle and starts off.*) All right, I'm off with Sadik to the mountains.

Eli (*taking hold of the rifle*): Didn't you give this to me? This is a symbol of our friendship, I want to keep it as a memento.

Kasen (*not letting go of the rifle*): That sort of friendship ought to be destroyed. (*He breaks the rifle.*) Let's forget the past and build a new friendship. It's time for you to get rid of all your bad habits.

Eli (*angrily*): You....

Kasen: I know. (*Spreads his hands.*) I'm an ignorant clod, an eccentric. Goodbye. (*Exit singing cheerfully.*)

(*From the meeting room come sounds of cheers and applause, enthusiastic singing and fiddling. Eli slouches off with hanging head, carrying his raincoat and the broken rifle.*)

(*Bebesh runs into the inner room to fetch a padded jacket, then hurries back to join Amina and the others.*)

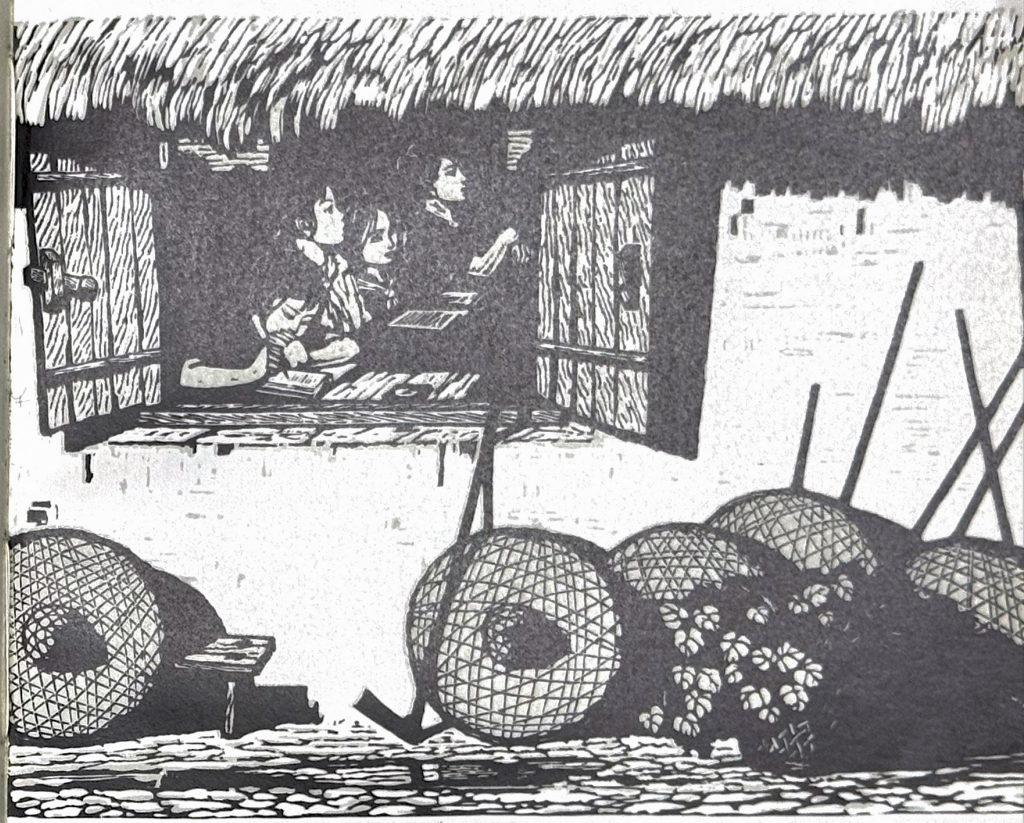
Wu (*calling as he enters*): Sadik, Amina, Maira, Kasen! Our guests have come with a red banner. Where are you all?

Bebesh: They've gone.

Wu: Where to?

Bebesh: To the mountains.

Wu: Trust those youngsters!



Village School (coloured woodcut) ▶
by Hsu Kuang

About the artist see the article on p. 110.

Bebesh: Shall I call them back, Director Wu?
Wu: No, little Bebesh, you go with them.
Bebesh: You mean it?
Wu: Of course I do.
Bebesh: Director Wu! (*She runs off.*)
Kasymbek (*entering*): Where are they all?
Wu: There! (*Points to the distance.*)
Kasymbek: Well, Sadik.... These young people make me so happy that I want to cry. That's fine. I've nothing to worry about now. All right, director, shall I fetch the guests here for tea?
Wu: Yes, do.
Kasymbek: Kambar! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Eli.*)

Eli: Comrade Wu Chun.
Wu: Well, Comrade Eli, how do you feel now?

(*Eli lowers his head.*)

Wu: Individualism is a dead end. If you take that path you will destroy yourself. Turn back quickly and catch them up.
Eli: I'm too far behind, Director Wu.
Wu: Not if you recognize your mistake and make up your mind to do better. You can still catch them up. Look, Sadik and the others are just ahead. (*Points to the distance.*)

CURTAIN

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

Hsu Lien

A Fur Robe Twice Delivered

On the grassland the May weather is fickle: it's clear one moment and cloudy the next, and wind and snow come at quick intervals. The morning began fine and bright, but by noon it got gusty and the sky darkened. Ahma Phagtso was preparing extra feed for the lambs when a cold blast piercing the tent made her shiver. She hurried to the door and looked outside. The sky was overcast with black clouds and the grassland bleary underneath. She couldn't help worrying.

"Nyikarkyab forgot to take his fur robe with him this morning when he went herding in the hills," she said to herself. "He has very little on; he'll be cold in this sudden change of weather."

Widowed at thirty, Ahma Phagtso was now past fifty. When her husband died, her son Nyikarkyab was just one year old. They owned not a single sheep or cow. Their sole property was a wretched tent. Ahma herded sheep and cattle for the local lord and suffered immense hardship to bring up her only son, whom she loved dearly. She did most of the work in the house and out on the pastures herself,

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Hsu Lien is a newspaper editor.

for fear that the boy would strain himself. It was only after the people's commune was set up and she saw how enthusiastic everyone was about work that she let her son go to the pastures and high mountains. Nevertheless, she always had a little roasted mutton and liquor ready for him at the end of a day's work.

The wind was blowing harder, like many sharp daggers whizzing past her door. Ahma grew more worried as she looked at the sky and listened to the howling wind. "Tomorrow is Nyikarkyab's wedding day. It would be too bad if he caught cold." Hastily taking up her son's fur robe and fur cap, she dashed out into the whirling wind and sand.

Everything was a blur. The distant mountains and the green grass and wild flowers on nearby hills were all indiscernible. The sky was grey as lead. All of a sudden big snowflakes began to fall.

Treading the soft white snow, Ahma climbed uphill in the teeth of the roaring gale. In the distance, somebody was heading towards her across snow-covered ground. When he drew nearer, she saw it was Trahiikyab, the tall old brigade leader. She noticed that he had only a thin lined jacket on. Always considerate of old and young, he had been doing a good job of leading his brigade's animal husbandry work.

"He's wearing so little," Ahma Phagtso thought in concern. "If he should fall sick, who would lead our production?" She hurried over to him.

"Ah, it's you, elder sister," Trahiikyab greeted her warmly.

Forgetting about her own son, Ahma held out the fur robe and said, "The bird soaring above the high peak must be a valiant eagle, the man running in the snow and wind must be our old brigade leader. How fortunate. I was looking for you and here you are."

"Looking for me?" Trahiikyab looked at the fur robe and then at Ahma, bewildered.

"Yes," Ahma smiled. "I dropped into your tent to see your wife and she asked me to bring you this fur robe. She's too busy to come herself."

"Really?" exclaimed the old brigade leader, surprised. Wiping the melted snow from his sun-tanned face, Trahiikyab laughed. "That's very thoughtful of her. This fine fur robe will keep me very warm indeed."

Ahma laughed too, seeing the brigade leader so gay. "Put it on, Uncle Trahiikyab," she said. "Don't catch cold."

"Wait, it's not good to accept a gift without giving one in return." Taking two parcels from his pocket he handed them to Ahma. "I went to the township for a meeting this morning and bought these for you and Dojethar, I remembered that you've run out of salt. This will save you a trip."

Quite moved, Ahma took the salt. She stepped forward and draped the robe over the brigade leader's shoulders. "When the sheep and cattle smell of the fragrant *kalzang* flowers, they graze more; when commune members are taken care of by you, we are happier," she remarked.

"I'm only doing what Chairman Mao expects of us." He straightened the robe and said: "Thank you, elder sister." Then off he went along the path leading east.

Ahma found that the hat of fox pelt was still in her hand. She hurried after him, shouting, "Put the hat on too...." But he was walking rapidly, and couldn't hear her in the howling wind. She halted, gazing at his receding figure.

She remembered on snowy night last winter. Nyikarkyab was seriously ill. Desperate, Ahma had set off in pitch darkness in a snowstorm for the township to fetch a doctor. When she reached the first mountain slope she met the brigade leader, returning from a meeting in the township. As soon as he heard her story he told her that the two doctors in the township were now stationed in production brigades, and the nearest one was thirty *li* away. He volunteered to fetch the doctor for her, saying that he knew the mountain paths pretty well. Telling her to go home to look after her son, he went off.

"Where would we be today if it weren't for the Communist Party and our good brigade leader?" she thought. Giving him the robe was a token of her gratitude to him and the Party. Just then a fresh gust of wind reminded her that Nyikarkyab was still without a fur robe. She turned downhill and hurried back to her tent. The milk-tea in the kettle was boiling. She poured it into a thermos and refilled the kettle with water and milk. She added some dried cow-dung to the fire. Then she went to the *kang* and, opening the case on it, took out the new fur robe which Nyikarkyab was to wear for his wedding. Taking a bowl along with the thermos flask, she

once again braved the wind and snow, and headed for the southern slope.

As soon as she reached the grassy hill, she saw a young herdsman with a flock of sheep. The young man saw the robe in Ahma Phagtso's hand and he turned to shout, "Your mother is here, Nyikarkyab."

Hearing the call, Nyikarkyab came over quickly. "Such a long distance and the snow so heavy. Really, ma...." he said reproachfully, eyeing the snowflakes on his mother's head and shoulders.

Ahma paid no attention to his words but stared at the fur robe he was wearing. "Whose is that?" she asked.

"Trahiikyab, the brigade leader," Nyikarkyab replied. The expression on his mother's face made him uneasy.

"*Ai*, what a baby you are. How can you take the old brigade leader's fur robe on such a snowy day?"

"He said he was going to the east hill and could pick up another robe in his tent on the way. He forced this one on me."

"Even so you shouldn't have taken it. He is an old man. If he caught cold, how would you feel? From tomorrow on you will be a man with a wife, but you still act like a child."

Nyikarkyab lowered his head.

"Is Dojethar around?" Ahma asked.

"He came a while ago to say that the brigade leader wants us to drive the flocks to the eastern hill where it's not so windy and the grass is good. He's gone now. What do you want him for, ma?"

"Trahiikyab bought a parcel of salt for him. Tell him to come and get it at our tent."

"Why is Dojethar wearing my fur robe, ma?" asked Nyikarkyab.

"What?" Ahma was startled. So the brigade leader had given his own robe to Nyikarkyab and then Nyikarkyab's to Dojethar.

"Come on, quick. The old brigade leader must be freezing."

They drove the flock towards the eastern hill. When they reached the slope they saw several shepherds. Ahma, whose eyes were sharp, at once sighted the brigade leader talking to a herdsman. Quickly she went up to him and scrutinized him from head to toe. He was still wearing only a black lined jacket.

"You don't care what the weather is like," she scolded. "Why did you give the fur robe to Dojethar instead of wearing it yourself? If you catch cold and fall ill, we'll feel very bad."

"Ha, ha, no fear of that. Is 'my wife' sending you with a fur robe again?" he asked humorously, looking at the new robe in her hand. "Set your heart at ease, elder sister. An eagle is judged by its wings and a man by his experience. I herded sheep for cattle-owners for more than thirty years in the old society. In those days when it snowed I had less clothes on than I have now. But the cold didn't kill me. It won't hurt me to be out like this for a little while."

"Put this on, please." Ahma held out the new robe.

"Why, this is Nyikarkyab's wedding robe. Better let him take off my old garment and wear this," said Trahiikyab.

Ahma smiled, for she knew what he meant. "Who cares about those old conventions. If it hadn't been for you, Nyikarkyab might not have survived that snowy night last winter. Put it on quick. Don't suffer the cold any longer than necessary." According to local tradition, things intended for the bride and the bridegroom could not be used by others first. But today Ahma gave her son's wedding garment to her respected Trahiikyab. She waited until he had put on the robe. Then she took out the bowl, poured him some hot milk-tea and urged him to drink.

"The rest of you drink first," said Trahiikyab.

"No, you take the first bowl. This is a rule of our hospitality," Ahma said, handing the bowl to him.

Trahiikyab took it and downed the milk-tea at one gulp. Wiping his lips, he remarked smilingly, "It's true to say that as the mouth drinks the heart warms." Turning towards Nyikarkyab, he said, "I'll drink your milk-tea again tomorrow evening when I come to offer you my best wishes on your wedding."

"That's right," shouted several herdsmen, who crowded around to drink milk-tea too. One of them remarked:

"Tomorrow you must give our brigade leader the place of honour and treat all of us to wine, Nyikarkyab."

Blushing, Nyikarkyab hid behind his mother. A girl in a blue satin fur gown made a face at him. Clapping her hands, she shouted at someone in the distance, "Sister Yangtso, come here quickly, Brother Nyikarkyab is asking for you." Peals of laughter resounded in the valley.

The gay laughter drove off the wind and snow and called out the sun. Suddenly, radiant sunshine tinged the white grassy hill pink, making the grassland all the more beautiful.

Translated by Chang Su
Illustration by Chang Li

Hung Mei and Wang Kuan

Substitute for a Day

Big Tsui the postman was not feeling well. Our section head said to me, "Hsiao-ping, Big Tsui's leg has been injured. For the time being we have no one to replace him. The leadership wants you to take up his job for a few days. It's a rather hard route for a girl. Do you think you can do it?"

"Sure," I replied readily. "It won't be so hard." I thought the job was simple enough — going from village to village and calling at different production brigades, delivering letters and newspapers.

"So far you've been working in the office only," said the section head, guessing what was on my mind. "This job is not as easy as you think."

His words reminded me of Big Tsui who was rather a funny fellow. Something of a giant, he always wore an old-fashioned black jacket, a pair of homespun trousers and heavy shoes. Though still in his early twenties, he had his hair shaven clean. We thought he was awfully funny and laughed at the way he screwed up his big mouth

Hung Mei and Wang Kuan are both young peasants in a people's commune in Hopei Province.

in a broad grin before he spoke. When it came to work, however, he was always the first to pick up the mail from me early in the morning and the last to return in the evening.

Yet, strange as it may seem, this old "slow coach" never failed to be listed among the advanced workers every quarter.

After breakfast I took out the bicycle, ready to set off. Just then Big Tsui came limping up, leaning on a stick. "Hsiao-ping," he said, grinning as usual. "I've something for you to do besides delivering the mail."

"What is it?"

"Blast this leg of mine," he said rubbing his right leg. "It's keeping me from attending to a lot of things."

"What a man. Can't you say what's on your mind quickly?" I was getting impatient.

"The fact is," he smiled in his awkward way again, "my requests are all out of the usual routine. You better note them down. Tell Sister Liu Yu-lan of the Liu Village that I have asked someone to buy the drug she wanted from Tientsin and will be sure to get it in a couple of days. While you're in Chao Village, tell Brigade Leader Ting that the Supplies Department in town now has a fresh batch of chemical fertilizer, he'd better send someone in with a cart. And while you are there, inquire after Little Tiger for me, see if his arm is all right. And here," he produced a little box from his pocket, "give this to Aunt Chao, it's for Little Tiger's arm...."

"What an old fuss-pot. What have all these things got to do with a postman?" I thought, but didn't say it aloud as I jotted down his remarks in my notebook.

When I was some distance away I happened to turn back and saw Big Tsui still standing there, staring after me. He looked worried, as if I were a three-year-old leaving its mother for the first time. So he thinks I won't be able to manage.

Outside the city, the first twenty *li* was comparatively easy going. But after a while the bike seemed to grow heavier and heavier; my legs too were getting very stiff. Suddenly, as luck would have it, one tyre went flat. That really got me, and I had no choice but to push the bike along. I walked for quite a distance before sighting a repair stall by the roadside. I rushed over. The young man in charge was very friendly.

He eyed me with some curiosity and remarked, "Why, isn't this Big Tsui's 'Flying Dove'? Something wrong with it again, eh?"

He started to remove the inner tube. I must admit I had never before seen such a mess of patch-upon-patch. Knitting his bushy eyebrows, the young man muttered, "Big Tsui is economical to a fault. This tube should have been replaced long ago, but he always says, 'Make it do, old fellow. A new inner tube will cost the post office a lot of money.' "

"So Big Tsui is careful with the office's money," I thought, listening to the young fellow's praise-like criticism.

When he had finished the repair job, I took out my purse to pay him. Waving his hand, he told me, "You don't seem to know, comrade, that I'm sent here by the repair shop of our people's commune to repair any of our commune's carts that have trouble on the road. The few simple repairs I do for passers-by while I'm here are only incidental. If I took money for every little service, Big Tsui would have had to pay me more than half his monthly wages."

When I had thanked him and resumed my journey the sun was already high in the sky. I told myself I must hurry otherwise I too would turn out to be a "slow coach."

In quick succession I went from one village to another until I covered eight of them. I had carried out most of the errands Big Tsui gave me. When I arrived at Chao Village it was already past noon. The commune members were resting after lunch under an old locust tree at the entrance of the village. They crowded round me as soon as I arrived, looking through the pile of letters and asking for their newspapers. I had my hands full attending to them.

"Why isn't Big Tsui here?" asked a middle-aged man whose head was covered with a white towel. "Is his leg worse?"

"Yes," I replied. "I'm his substitute for the time being."

"So, the leg's swollen," he remarked with concern. "The other day we didn't want him to leave but he insisted. It's no joke to have a swollen leg in this weather."

"With Big Tsui laid up, how'll we know when to go for the chemical fertilizer, brigade leader?" put in a young man.

That reminded me of Big Tsui's message. "Are you Brigade Leader Ting?" I asked.

The man nodded, smiling.

"Big Tsui wants me to tell you that the chemical fertilizer has arrived. You are to send a cart for it."

"Wonderful." Ting clapped his big hands. "Good thing it's come. The soil is still damp enough and this is the right moment to spread fertilizer on the maize field. We'll go for it right away." He turned to leave.

"Be sure to call on Big Tsui when you get to town, brigade leader," several of the men there called out in unison.

"I won't forget."

Just then a woman over fifty emerged from a lane and hurried over. She gripped my hand and said breathlessly, "Has Big Tsui's leg become worse? It's all because of our Little Tiger."

"You must be Aunt Chao," I exclaimed.

"Yes. Our Little Tiger owes his life to Big Tsui."

I took out the box of ointment from my post-bag and handed it to her. "Big Tsui bought this for Little Tiger, aunt. It'll prevent inflammation and pain."

"Ah, he's so kind," said Aunt Chao, taking the ointment with trembling hands. I saw there were tears in her eyes. "Please wait a little while for me, sis." And she went off.

At a loss, I asked a girl sitting there reading a newspaper what it was all about. She told me that it happened two days ago.

Little Tiger and several children were tending cattle on the western slope. Suddenly a big ox butted a calf which was grazing near by. The startled calf rushed down the slope, its eyes popping and tail bristling. Little Tiger who was quick and nimble chased after it and caught hold of the halter rope. This made the calf more panicky and it dashed headlong towards the edge of a cliff overlooking a deep lake, dragging Little Tiger along. Little Tiger yelled and struggled desperately but the other children, too paralysed with fear to move, could only cry and shout, "Help! Help!" At this critical moment Big Tsui happened to be pushing his bike along a bluff on an adjacent hill. At the sight of the dangerous situation he threw down his bike and jumped from the bluff. Though he hurt his leg, he paid no attention but in one leap caught the calf by the neck, holding it tightly so that it could not move.

When the people working below hurried up the hill they saw the boy, whose legs and arms were badly bruised, lying in Big Tsui's arms. The postman was bending anxiously over him.

"Look at your leg, Big Tsui," cried Brigade Leader Ting, rolling up the postman's trouser leg. There was a big cut just below Big Tsui's right knee, and blood was soaking through his trousers. Aunt Chao, who hurried over when she heard the commotion, joined Ting in urging Big Tsui to stay with them for the night.

"I appreciate your kindness," the postman said. "But there are still several villages I have to visit. People may have important errands for me." Gritting his teeth, he rode off.

When the girl finished her tale, the others under the tree added their comments:

"What a good fellow he is. Always so kind and considerate."

"His job is to deliver mail, but he also reads and writes letters for those who want his help."

"Whenever the newspapers arrive, Big Tsui gives us a summary of the main events."

"Though a postman, he serves us in many other ways as well."

Listening to what they were saying, I no longer thought of Big Tsui as a funny countrified fellow. I began to see what a good, simple and admirable person he was. To people who knew him he was indispensable.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," said Aunt Chao, hurrying back with a big parcel which she thrust into my hands. "These are our home-grown red dates. Please give them to Big Tsui. Tell him not to worry about Little Tiger. He's practically recovered. Big Tsui must take good care of that leg of his."

"I'll tell him." Somehow I hadn't the heart to refuse the gift for Big Tsui.

The setting sun was red behind the western hills. Though I had had a rather long journey that day, I didn't feel a bit tired. I was brimming with energy all the way home.

Translated by Chang Su
Illustration by Lu Yen

Poems

I Love This Life

Smoke stacks as if piercing
the clouds; white smoke floating
lightly through the dawn; every
morning up before sunrise
going through streets packed with
youth singing and laughing together.

The finest music comes with
the movement of many machines
working in unison, making so grand
a song of their own, my heart beats
in rhythm with it; so does this
chant of progress raise our production.

Wen Cheng-hsun, a worker born in 1934 in Peking, is the author of the collections of poems *My Mother's City* and *I Love This Life*

My lathe and I are as close
friends, comrades; it is also
my weapon; day and night we are
together, affection deepening
between us; my lathe and I winning
battles on our production front.

The new machines are a steely blue,
gleaming and splendid; chrome
plated controls brighter than
moonlight; jewels created
by our labour; I happy because
of my share in building them.

Who said that separation is bad?
Eagerly we farewelled the machines
we had made, as if we were
sending off soldiers to the front.
Our motherland needs you, "Go, child."
You must not disappoint the care
your mother lavished on you.

Young folk compare their strength
with iron and steel; their
lives are full of happiness through
struggle; to put many words into one,
I love this life.

Night Shift

The night is hardly peaceful
and quiet; the sound of many
machines struggling as if for
ascendancy; our shop goes
full blast day and night;
never sleeps, never tires.

The round moon shines in
with a clear light, quietly
observing us from outside
the window; and we ask it
why it stares so hard, for we are
just like it, resting by day
busy at night.

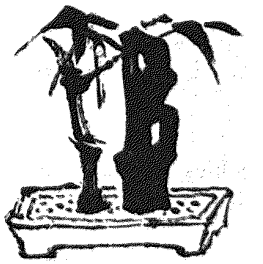
Who said that the moon would
arouse dreamy thoughts? Not so
with us; we are changing dreams
to reality, it is for this we
work day and night.

Outside the window stars fade one
by one; the space beside my machine
piles high; just before dawn when
starlight is entirely gone, then
is the most tense moment of struggle.

I have seen the sky dyed with
the colours of dawn; seen too, the
first stream of blue smoke come
from our chimney stack; I return
home to sleep, with the golden sun
shining on my back, breathing in
the morning air, so fresh, clean,
delightful!

Each ordinary night, several
completed machines are crated;
just in one night that few take
notice of, one more floor is
added to the great building
of our land.

Translated by Rewi Alley



Wonderful!

(UIGHUR)

There was once a peasant who couldn't earn his living though he worked in the fields all summer long. So he left his home and settled in another village. When winter drew near, he kept the temperature in his room warm and started to grow musk-melons. When they ripened, he presented the first fresh melon to the king.

The king did not believe it possible to grow melons in such cold weather. "Can melons ripen in winter too?" he asked the peasant doubtfully.

"Yes," answered the peasant.

"Wonderful!" said the king in surprise. "Did you discover the method yourself?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful!" said the king with a smile. After a pause, he asked, "Did you think of presenting the melon to me yourself?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful!" the king remarked again. However, he did not set much value on the melon which the peasant had grown with so much trouble, and gave him nothing as a reward.

After leaving the palace, the peasant felt very hungry. Suddenly he heard a cook in an eating-house shouting, "Fried rice, dumplings...."

After some thought the peasant went in and ate twenty dumplings. Then he called the cook over and asked:

"Were these dumplings cooked in that steamer?"

"Yes," was the cook's reply.

"Wonderful!" said the peasant. Then he asked again, "Were they prepared by yourself?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful, I believe it. Wonderful!" With that he strolled out of the eating-house.

"What's the matter with you? Pay me for my dumplings." The cook, very angry, caught him by the collar. "We haven't so many dumplings that we can give them away for your senseless 'Wonderfuls.' Pay me!"

The peasant refused and they began to quarrel. Furious, the cook dragged the peasant to the palace and complained to the king.

"Why didn't you pay for the dumplings you ate?" asked the king indignantly.

"Your Majesty, when I presented you with my musk-melon grown in the winter," the peasant replied, "you took it and gave me only three 'Wonderfuls' in exchange. When I went to the eating-house, I used the same method. I ate twenty dumplings and repeated 'Wonderful' three times. Strangely enough, three of Your Majesty's

'Wonderfuls' couldn't even get me twenty dumplings. Please judge our case, Your Majesty."

The king wasn't able to say a word.

The Smell of Food and the Tinkling of Coins

(KAZAKH)

While walking down the street one day, Hogranasr heard a commotion in a restaurant. Curious, he went in for a look and found the manager, a very fat man, beating a fellow who obviously was quite poor. The poor man's clothes were torn in the struggle but the relentless fatty kept on cursing and beating him. Hogranasr hastened forward and pulled them apart.

"What are you beating him for?" he asked the fat manager.

"This pauper tried to slip away without paying," the manager announced angrily.

"What did he have?" Hogranasr asked again, "and how much does he owe you?"

"After he entered my restaurant," explained the manager righteously, "he produced a piece of bread and sat for a long time without eating it. He waited until his bread was flavoured with the delicious smell of the food from our kitchen. Of course he should pay me for that — you can't get the smell of food for nothing."

"Yes, you're quite reasonable," said Hogranasr and turned to the poor man. "Well, what have you got to say?"

"It's true that I came to his restaurant and it's true that I sat on the threshold to eat my bread. I intended to order something, but I found the food here too expensive. I did not have enough money. So I waited, hoping he would give me some left-overs. But the pitiless lord gave me nothing; finally I could only eat my own piece of bread. Do you think he should ask me to pay him simply for that?"

"You're reasonable too," said Hogranasr, nodding. "But, excuse me, have you got any money at all?"

"Yes. But only two or three cents."

"Give them to me then. A few cents will do," put in the fat manager, stretching out his hand. "Otherwise you can't go away."

"Have patience, manager," Hogranasr said soothingly. "Please go over there and wait a minute."

When fatty was gone, Hogranasr whispered a few words in the poor man's ear, and took the coins from him. Cupping his hands over the coins, he called, "Please come here, manager."

The money-grubbing manager came running over happily, thinking that he would be given the money. "Thank you very much."

Hogranasr tinkled the coins in his hands beside fatty's ear, then returned the money to the poor man.

"What are you doing?" shouted the manager, sweating with anger. "Why don't you give me the money?"

"I like to be fair," said Hogranasr coolly. "He didn't eat your food, did he? He only enjoyed the delicious smell from your kitchen. Now you've enjoyed the tinkling of his coins. You've both had a good bargain. The smell of your food is worth no more than the sound of his coins. What else do you want?"

Translated by Sung Shou-chuan
Illustrations by Li Yu-hung

A Song for Kindred Hearts (traditional painting) ▶
by Chung Wei

This young artist learned painting in his spare time in the People's Liberation Army, which he joined in 1949 and where he still serves. This painting was shown in the Third Art Exhibition of the Chinese People's Liberation Army earlier this year.

Wang Chao-wen

Some Reflections on Peking Operas with Contemporary Themes

The dramas performed at the festival of Peking opera on contemporary themes gave evidence not only of a revolution in content but also of an enrichment and development of artistic form.

Peking operas with contemporary themes cannot separate themselves from the traditional theatre but must bring new changes into it. This renovated art which aims at serving the people is bound to reject certain of the past traditions, while in some ways it is already superior to them. For although Peking opera has been polished for generations, its restricted content inevitably makes it in various respects lag behind the artistic form of the new operas, young though these may be. Since content determines form, these operas on contemporary themes demand new appropriate forms and innovations in the different traditional roles, music, stage conventions and stage décor. Thanks to these innovations to make the form correspond

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Wang Chao-wen is a well-known art critic born in Szechuan in 1910. During the War of Resistance Against Japan he taught in the Lu Hsun Art Academy in Yenan. He is now the editor-in-chief of the monthly *Art*.

to the new content, the art of Peking opera has been raised to new heights.

Chao Yen-hsia who plays Sister Ah-ching in *Spark amid the Reeds** and Kao Yu-chien who plays Granny Li in *The Red Lantern*,** both of whom act the *hua-tan* role of young women of humble origin, have broken through the conventional restrictions of this traditional role. The former has to bring out the noble qualities of a Communist posing as the owner of a tea-house; the latter, the resolution and steadiness of an old revolutionary through a housewife. So the role of both has been changed and enriched.

A similar break with convention was made by Fang Yung-hsiang, as regimental commander of the Chinese Volunteers in *Raid on the Tiger Regiment*,*** who plays a *tung-chui hua-lien* or warrior with an important singing part; and by Li Yung-wei, as the transport worker Hu Erh in *Gate No. 6*,**** who plays a *chia-tzu hua-lien* or warrior with a big acting part. In these new operas, Fang's singing conveyed the calm wisdom and strength of a veteran soldier, while Li without recourse to singing or gestures seemed the living image of a politically awakened worker brimming over with revolutionary enthusiasm. To give truthful portrayals of new characters unknown to the traditional theatre, not distorting the spirit of an officer tempered in battle and presenting an authentic image of a worker consciously serving the revolution, these actors had to break with their past training and use new techniques. This is in accordance with the laws of development of art. For the new content bursts the confines of the original types of role, extending their range.

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**An opera set in northeast China during the War of Resistance Against Japan. Seventeen years previously, during a strike of railway workers, Li Yu-ho and his mother, Granny Li, adopted Tieh-mei, the daughter of a worker killed in the struggle. They use a red lantern, a relic of the strike, to make contact with the revolutionaries. Li Yu-ho is trying to deliver a code-book to the Party when a renegade betrays him and all three of the family are arrested. Li and Granny Li are killed, but Tieh-mei carries out their task.

***In this opera during the Korean war a scout platoon of the Chinese Volunteers, assisted by the Korean People's Army, penetrates into enemy territory in disguise and captures the headquarters of the enemy's crack Tiger Regiment.

****This opera presents the sufferings of dockers and their struggle against the feudal powers on the eve of the liberation of Tientsin.

Peking opera conventions were created to depict the real life of earlier times. Operas with contemporary themes may have equally stylized and beautiful movements. This is not achieved, however, by taking over old conventions but by evolving new ones from them. Thus the heroic scouts in *Raid on the Tiger Regiment* make a forced march at night through enemy territory during a storm, advancing over muddy terrain, past barbed wire, mines, enemy sentries and other obstacles, and the magnificently spectacular dancing movements and acrobatics used to convey this are not drawn entirely from the stock conventions but include new stylized movements which truthfully depict our modern heroes.

In *A Bucket of Manure*, a short comedy about a woman who wants to carry manure to her private plot but is persuaded by her husband to take it to the commune fields, the *hua-tan* actress Tung Chih-ling makes brilliant use of her training in the part of Mrs. Chien. Her lively and rhythmical movements, the way she walks, gesticulates and uses her eyes, are not just replicas of old conventions but have been adapted to portray a hard-working but still somewhat selfish woman. The singing and acting in this opera are more expressive and moving than lengthy dialogue.

Similarly *The Red Lantern* combines singing and dialogue of the traditional type with highly effective and beautiful innovations in the dancing movements and acting. When Tieh-mei's father and grandmother have been killed because they refuse to divulge the whereabouts of the code-book, the enemy lets the girl go, meaning to trace the book through her. She returns home, puts on mourning, then picks up the red lantern to leave home for ever. Her dancing movements here show how she transforms her grief into strength and reveal her determination to deliver the code to the Party at all costs. These excellent innovations have the characteristics of Peking opera, make use of past conventions and owe much to tradition, yet conform to a new aesthetic taste and stem from an utterly new reality. Thus these conventions are different from the traditional conventions of Peking opera.

These operas on contemporary themes have also developed the singing in Peking opera. In *Gate No. 6* Hu Erh's father is dangerously ill and to buy medicine for him Hu has to sell his child. But when he reaches home with the medicine the old man has been kicked to death by a thug working for the feudal boss. Li Yung-wei who

plays Hu Erh overrides the conventional *chia-tzu hua-lien* singing style, singing quickly and passionately when he is stirred, more slowly at other times. Yet far from destroying the consistency and artistic effect of his characterization, these departures from tradition show the changes in the hero's thoughts and feelings more truthfully. Again when Tieh-mei in *The Red Lantern* leaves prison she walks slowly, unable to master her grief and fury, and the stirring chorus offstage builds up a powerful atmosphere, conveying her determination and conviction more effectively than if she were singing herself. *Chieh Chen-kuo,* a superb dramatization of some miners' struggle for freedom during the War of Resistance Against Japan, presents even greater variations in the singing accompaniment. When the miner Chieh Chen-kuo is hiding in a worker's home waiting to get in touch with the Party, the singing on stage and offstage is interlaced to supplement each other, sometimes forming a sort of dialogue. Adept use of this device helps to deepen the impact made by the militancy of the revolutionary miner.

Since form must be subservient to content, in these operas with contemporary themes reforms in the traditional stagecraft are not only possible but indispensable. As these are Peking operas, if they were too different from traditional operas the audience would not enjoy them. On the other hand, if they aimed simply at retaining traditional forms while the content was divorced from modern life, this would not find favour with audiences either. Modern men do not have hair one or two feet long. If we insisted on subordinating the content to the form and made a worker in mental anguish (for instance, Hu Erh in *Gate No. 6*) toss his hair about as in the traditional opera, even if feasible this would be laughable; and instead of sympathizing with the worker the audience would think the actor was making fun of him as well as of them. Shaking the beard, the long plumes on a headdress or the appendages of a cap are other traditional gestures which use artistic exaggeration to show emotion, in accordance with the laws of dramatic art. We are not against adapting such techniques in operas with contemporary themes, but obviously they cannot be retained unmodified if the objects on which they were based no longer exist.

If one considers conventions in isolation, it may seem a pity that these features of traditional operas can no longer be used. But if we take an all-round view and consider the law of development in

art, the fact that the new life demands the creation of new techniques and that new operas are bound to go on producing new dramatic conventions, this is not a matter for regret. We cannot disregard art's law that new things and new techniques must take the place of the old. Revolutionary Peking opera artists will have to provide new conventions in singing, recitative, acting and acrobatics which are acceptable to new audiences and suit their developing taste.

Artists with the courage to pioneer are bound to create new dramatic forms which are beautiful as well as true to life. The traditional drama went through a process of evolving simplicity from a mass of detail and rich forms from crude forms. The new opera must evolve in the same way. Our artists have already achieved some success in handling the relationship between the major and the minor characters as well as in the use of symbolism and real objects in scenery and in stagecraft. And we can expect these new operas which are so full of vitality to make much quicker progress than the theatre of the past, even if they inevitably encounter difficulties too.

When a creative artist integrates himself with the workers, peasants and soldiers and remoulds his thoughts and feelings, he is creating the prerequisite conditions for producing correct and profound new themes as well as concise and vivid artistic techniques. All genuinely new techniques must stem not only from the new phenomena which they imitate but also from the need to represent life accurately and graphically and from a developed artistic taste. An artist cut off from the life of the workers, peasants and soldiers is out of touch with the phenomena he has to reflect; he will lose his enthusiasm and courage to create art, his ability to reflect life through the drama, the confidence which enables him to make bold use of his knowledge.

Play-goers want operas with contemporary themes to show the life of workers, peasants and soldiers; at the same time they want these to be genuine Peking operas. It follows that no reforms may run counter to the special artistic features of the traditional theatre. Many new works in this festival proved that the aim of reforms in art is to reflect real life, while the basis of reforms is traditional art. Thus while breaking old conventions which are closely linked with old tastes, our actors must absorb nourishment from their distinctive artistic forms. Peking opera exponents who really want to serve

the masses should exercise discrimination, not rejecting everything out of hand but correctly dealing with the contradiction between creating new things and inheriting from the past.

The scene "A Battle of Wits" in *Spark amid the Reeds* presents a sharp clash between good and evil, between Sister Ah-ching and Tiao Teh-yi, who sing as follows:

Tiao: This is no ordinary woman.
Ah-ching: What tricks is Tiao Teh-yi up to?
Tiao: She has sharp eyes, a ready tongue.
Ah-ching: He hides daggers in his smile.
Tiao: She's neither humble nor pert.
Ah-ching: He's neither fish nor fowl.
Tiao: What is she after? Who backs her?
Ah-ching: Is he working for Chiang Kai-shek or the Japanese?
Tiao: I shall sound her out.
Ah-ching: I shall have to watch my step.

In this battle of wits both sides are vigilant, testing the other. They sing alternate lines in the style of traditional "soliloquies" and this is good theatre. In actuality, Sister Ah-ching and Tiao are afraid to expose their secrets, but this method of revealing their thoughts to the audience freely is bolder, more expressive and therefore more dramatic than the "asides" in modern drama. This is one example out of many of the successful use of traditional methods to depict new content.

The new operas do not adopt the old forms without any modification, but they make use of the skill embodied in them. The scene "Selling the Child" in *Gate No.6* is traditional in the sense that it evokes an imaginary scene on the stage; but at the same time the relationship of the characters is dealt with truthfully. When Hu Erh fails to find work and comes home, he longs to see his wife but hesitates to go in; while his wife inside longs for her husband's return, not knowing he is just outside the door. They sing one after the other, as if conversing and voicing their grief to each other face to face.

Both: Ah, a year like this hounds men to death.
Both: Cruel Heaven murders men.
Wife: Why has Heaven no eyes?
Why is Ta-pao's dad not back?
The poor man has not had a bite to eat for days.

Hu Erh: Ta-pao's mother has had a hard time of it all these years,
With never a square meal in my family.
Wife: You are out with so little padding in your coat.
Come back quickly! All I ask is to die together.
Hu Erh: How can I go in empty-handed?
Wife: Do you know how your wife is longing for you?
Hu Erh: Do you know that your husband dares not enter the door?

This method of handling the situation, overriding the limitations of space yet faithfully and convincingly presenting the relationship between the characters, is a new departure based on traditional techniques. Because it suits the audience's taste and they can grasp it, this helps to bring them closer to the characters on the stage, with the result that they are more deeply impressed and stirred.

When Peking opera artists try to make characters of this new age true to life, they are not against taking over useful features of traditional art and combining the imaginary with the realistic, rough sketches with meticulous touches, artistic exaggeration with simplicity, the obvious with the subtle, highlights with a harmonious whole. For the adoption of contemporary themes about a radically different life does not mean that the old laws of art do not repay careful study. Peking opera artists who are actively serving the workers, peasants and soldiers do not regard bold reforms and discriminating adoption of traditions as absolute opposites, but deal correctly with the relationship between the socialist content and the new national form. It is because Peking operas with revolutionary and contemporary themes have a Chinese style and Chinese spirit which our people like that their new revolutionary content is able to exert a powerful influence on play-goers far and wide.

Many actors have successfully solved the contradiction between reforming and inheriting the Chinese drama. Kuan Su-shuang, who plays the Chingpo girl in *Taino* who advances towards revolution, has introduced innovations in her singing and acting in accordance with the general laws of operatic art. The natural rhythm of her gestures, gait, hand and eye movements creates the impression of stylized beauty peculiar to Peking opera. When Taino finds the People's Liberation Army and determines not to return to her district which is controlled by a feudal chief, she seizes the lapel of an army woman doctor, bends down, then looks up at her and suddenly turns to face the audience. After gazing ahead for some seconds she voices

her determination: "I'll die before I go back." Her gestures are unlike those in a modern drama, but reinforced by the accompaniment of percussion instruments they make a strong impact and leave a deep impression, in a manner typical of the opera. While in no way detracting from the truthfulness of the character or situation, they also satisfy Peking opera audiences. The exaggerated dancing movements and powerful acting of Li Shih-ping as the company commander in *Red Sister** reveal what is in the mind of this gravely wounded but indomitable hero. He falls in a traditional fashion — doing the splits — which effectively conveys both his vigour and his exhaustion. He is a fine foil for the heroine Red Sister.

Whether introducing reforms or assimilating traditions, in order to educate the masses the actors in these new operas must evolve artistic forms appreciated by the masses. All drama is aimed at an audience and its artistic methods must suit the demands of that audience. Both the taste of one class and the national taste affect the theatre. If we simply accept the fact that the aim of drama is to reflect real life without considering the relationship between the reflection of life and the tastes and habits of the audience, it is impossible to explain the different forms and changes in opera and to use these artistic forms to serve new needs. The audience's taste which influences forms and changes develops with society, but popular taste has national roots and is hereditary. The relationship between reforms and inheriting from the past is a dialectic one. Without reforming Peking opera we cannot satisfy the audience's changed taste, but without inheriting past traditions we cannot satisfy their ingrained taste. The reforms in Peking opera reflect the changes in popular taste; the carrying on of traditions, the hereditary element in this taste. Inheriting from the past is the basis on which reforms can be made. Without reforms the masses would not be satisfied, but without inheriting from the past they would not like these operas either.

When art reflects life, it does not have to pretend to be life itself. In Peking opera we have symbolic movements and imaginary actions as well as stylized singing, dialogue, costumes and make-up which are more beautiful than real life. It would look ridiculous in real life if a man sang when swearing or weeping, or ran as if dancing after

*An opera about a peasant woman during the War of Liberation who risks her own life to hide a wounded officer of the people's army from the enemy.

an enemy agent. But in opera such actions which are polished and stylized seem genuine and convincing. Because the audience does not expect opera to be an exact replica of reality but expects beautiful conventions to show the essential truth, elocution is made expressive and pleasing by different rhythms, and a traveller's luggage is made so small a bundle that it will not impede his dancing movements. Characters merely make a pretence of eating and drinking, and may fall asleep sitting or even standing. It is impossible and unnecessary for any art to imitate everything in real life. Peking opera, which is a synthesis of singing, recitative, acting and acrobatics, makes discriminating use of each to show certain aspects of life, choosing and emphasizing some things and not others. For instance, when percussion instruments are used to show certain emotions or reactions, the important thing is that apart from creating a specific atmosphere and stage effect this makes the drama more moving and convincing, according with the taste of the audience. Thus in operas with contemporary themes we are not against inheriting useful traditional devices of this kind.

Li Chun

A Woodcut Artists' Group

In the all-China woodcut exhibitions of recent years, the works of the woodcut artists' group of the Szechuan branch of the Chinese Artists' Union have consistently attracted great attention. For in addition to skilfully adapting traditional techniques and introducing many innovations, these Szechuan artists have vividly reflected the new spirit and the ever increasing fine qualities of China's working people in the new socialist age.

Among the dozen or so artists in this group are veterans who joined the revolution during the War of Resistance Against Japan, using their art to help the war effort, as well as young artists who have graduated from school or college since liberation. This is a militant woodcut group, whose members closely follow the direction pointed out by Chairman Mao Tse-tung in his *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art* and have spent much time in factories, the countryside and minority areas. Living and working with workers, peasants and soldiers, whose life and enthusiasm have stirred them

Li Chun is a well-known woodcut artist born in Shansi in 1913. During the War of Resistance Against Japan he did art work in Yenan and the Shansi-Suiyuan border region. Now he is the assistant editor-in-chief of the monthly *Art*.

deeply, these artists have broadened the range of their subject-matter and explored new methods of expression.

This spring I was able to visit this group in Chungking, the chief city of Szechuan Province. The first thing I noticed when I entered their studio was seven certificates of merit on the wall, testifying to the group's fine achievements. I met two of their leading artists, Li Shao-yen and Niu Wen, who never studied in an art school but learned to make woodcuts while working in the ranks of the revolution. During the arduous war years they shared the dangers and hardships of the labouring people, becoming one with them. After liberation they came to Chungking and taught many young artists to identify themselves with the masses, passing on their own experience in this respect during revolutionary struggles and inspiring the younger generation to serve the labouring people with their art.

After serving for some years in the army, Li Shao-yen worked in a newspaper office in the liberated area where he made woodcut illustrations and picture-story books, designed titles and drew maps and cartoons — he never despised any work that was useful for the revolution. During his long stay in the newspaper office he gradually evolved a simple style, basically the same style he used after liberation to illustrate the well-known novel *Red Crag* and give a forceful depiction of a steadfast revolutionary who waged arduous struggles in the Kuomintang jail.

Niu Wen was born in a poor peasant family and as a boy he loved to paint and was influenced by folk art, but he never dreamed of becoming an artist himself. In 1937 he joined the revolution as a member of a propaganda team. His creative enthusiasm was forged in the fiery crucible of revolution, impelling him to use woodcuts to reflect the real struggles in life. After liberation Niu Wen went with some younger artists to Tibet. During a festival in Lhasa he saw a Tibetan woman drawing designs with ashes on the ground to pray for a good harvest. Her happiness gave a new significance to this time-honoured custom, and so Niu Wen made a woodcut of two women drawing on the ground to show the joy of the Tibetan people after the democratic reform. The composition is very interesting and the characters are beautifully and vividly etched with skilled, forceful strokes.

Among young artists in this group these three are the most outstanding: Li Huan-min, Wu Fan and Hsu Kuang.

Pasture-land by Li Huan-min

Li Huan-min's works deal mostly with the new life of the Tibetan people, the swift and breath-taking changes on the steppes; Wu Fan generally chooses everyday incidents to show the people's high socialist consciousness; while most of Hsu Kuang's woodcuts are exuberant representations of new things in China. Much as they differ in their choice of subject and style, these three artists all convey the spirit of this age so powerfully that their works make a strong appeal.

Li Huan-min is now thirty-four and has been working since liberation in the Szechuan branch of the Chinese Artists' Union. He has made long trips with some of the older artists, climbing mountains in Tibet to live with the herdsmen there and make friends with them. He knows how the Tibetan serfs suffered before their liberation and can enter into their joy now that they are their own masters after the democratic reform. He told me how he visited Thaba Commune, all the members of which had been the slaves of a Lama monastery and known as "thaba" or "beggars." As a reminder of their past sufferings, they gave this name to their commune. This district had never grown crops before and many of them had never tasted grain, subsisting on the bones and rancid butter thrown out by the monastery. In 1960 they reaped their first crop of *chingko* barley — it was a good harvest. And Li Huan-min arrived just in time for this. It was a busy and exciting occasion, for the local magistrate, county Party

secretary, administrative personnel, students and men of the People's Liberation Army all joined in to help. Li Huan-min joined in as well and shared in the irrepressible joy of the Tibetans. He was profoundly moved and his well-known woodcut *The First Bumper Harvest* was made at that time.

While there he made friends with a woman team leader called Wangmo, which in Tibetan means "young girl." She was the daughter of serfs who could not afford to buy a name for her in the monastery, so even after she was twenty they still called her Wangmo. She was now a vigorous, tireless worker who took the keenest interest in everything new. Every day she milked thirty cows, each one three times a day, and then made butter, fed the calves, dried cow-dung for manure, ground barley, boiled milk and fetched water; yet she was always singing and laughing as if her energy were inexhaustible. In this emancipated woman who had shaken off the fetters of serfdom the artist saw the tremendous spiritual strength which liberation has brought to the labouring people. One of the girls in *The First Bumper Harvest* is based on Wangmo. The vivid characterization and fluid lines of the woodcut are delightful.

Li Huan-min told me of another experience he had in a village of Tibetan herdsmen, where he met a young assistant in the local state trading centre. This lad was called Little Shingna, which means "dry stick," because he had been so thin and weak as a serf. After liberation he became a shop assistant and for this job he needed to learn Chinese. He and the young artist agreed to exchange language lessons. One night Li Huan-min noticed a light in Shingna's tent. When he tiptoed over he saw Shingna with an oil lamp in one hand and a notebook in the other, awkwardly pronouncing the Chinese names of different commodities, "towel," "soap" and so forth. Very stirred but unwilling to disturb his friend, Li slipped quietly away, seeing in his mind's eye all the serfs and slaves in Tibet in the old days, fettered and begging on the roads, and these same people now that they had become their own masters and were beginning to get an education. He subsequently made the woodcut *Study*, showing a sturdy herdsman with a rifle leaning against a railing to study the book in his big hand. His frowning concentration conveys how difficult he finds this and how determined he is to master culture. The stirring quality in Li Huan-min's art undoubtedly comes from

his closeness to the labouring people and his deep understanding of them.

Wu Fan's works are also full of feeling and sincere love for working people of the socialist age, whose noble spiritual qualities he discovers in ordinary incidents. He sees the fine public-spiritedness of postmen, train attendants, street sweepers, bus conductors and many others in similar professions. His recent work *At the Bus Terminus** is a coloured woodcut in the traditional style showing a girl conductor getting a quick drink of water at a small station where the bus is halting in the middle of a long journey. She shows no fatigue but is drinking happily, ready to dash back to help the passengers who are getting on or off. The skilful use of Chinese ink in this woodcut gives it some affinity to a Chinese painting.

Trying out the Piano by the same artist is a simple yet graphic study of a girl worker. Wu Fan told me how he came to make this. He was taken by a friend to the Chungking Musical Instruments Factory which had started from scratch with very poor equipment but was now making excellent pianos, and it seemed miraculous to him to see an ordinary girl worker playing a pleasant tune to try out a piano. "I can't remember how my friend and I left the workshop," he said, "but the sound of that piano echoed in my ears all the way home, and that girl with her skilled and enterprising hands kept rising before my eyes. So I made this woodcut." I found myself drawn to the girl sitting at the piano, she looks so intelligent and serious. The effective composition provides a good foil for the central character.

Life is the inexhaustible source of art, and any artist who seriously plunges into it will find inspiration there. Wu Fan's works show his deep love of life and this accounts to a great extent for his success.

Hsu Kuang, still in his twenties, is also working in the Szechuan branch of the Chinese Artists' Union. Once he went to stay in a middle school set up by the peasants of a village in Pahsien County. He soon discovered this was an unusual school with not only textbooks, pens and ink in it but hoes, straw hats, sickles and fodder as well. The teachers in addition to giving lessons also grew vegetables and opened up waste land with the peasants. The school children, who came from peasant families, combined study with work in the fields. Hsu Kuang was struck by the revolutionary spirit and hard

*See *Chinese Literature* No. 5, 1964.

work of these teachers and students. "The longer I stayed there," he told me, "the more attached to them I became, the more eager to depict their fine qualities." He felt that if all schools could follow suit, bringing up millions of young people with socialist consciousness, a good education and a good attitude to work to carry on the revolution, we could speed up the coming of communism. This was the idea he had in mind when he made *Village School.* In the foreground are hoes, straw hats and fodder, and through the window of the thatched schoolhouse we see students concentrating on their lesson. The young people and their tools form an organic whole, expressing the spirit of the new generation.

Once Hsu Kuang put up in a hostel in Pahsien. Late in the evening he saw two girls sweeping and cleaning the dining room thoroughly, after which they quickly worked out the day's accounts. They were remarkably competent and cheerful. Later he got to know them. Cheng Chieh was the daughter of a poor peasant who had suffered in

Trying out the Piano by Wu Fan

Late at Night by Hsu Kuang

the old society and was devoted to the new. The other, Li Yung-en, who was just nineteen, had been in the county song and dance ensemble and at first did not like being transferred to this job. But when Cheng Chieh helped her to realize that this too was revolutionary work she became very keen on it. Later Hsu Kuang paid regular visits to another dining room to learn more about the life of these working girls. He helped them shell peanuts, peel onions and make dumplings, like an apprentice learning from them. By degrees they became his friends and the first critics of his new woodcuts. When he made the woodcut *Late at Night* and showed it to the waitresses, cooks and accountants in this dining room, they were quick to offer comments and suggestions. He made several corrections based on these and in the final version used the Han dynasty stone-rubbing technique of incisions against a dark background to convey the late hour and throw the characters into strong relief. This woodcut has proved a very popular one.

This woodcut artists' group in Szechuan constantly arranges for its members to go out and live with workers and peasants and become their good friends. This is how they discover new characters and scenes and gain fresh inspiration. And because they have come to love the labouring people, they can produce moving works. These artists take a serious attitude towards work. Each passes on the first draft of his woodcuts to the others for their suggestions and advice. Thanks to this mutual aid and method of learning from each other, many young artists in this small collective have made very rapid progress. The group's encouragement helps them to be boldly creative and to evolve their own distinctive styles.

Liang Li-chi

Some Indonesian Works in Chinese Translation

At the time of the first Afro-Asian Conference in 1955, I found the newly published *Selected Indonesian Folk-songs* in the Hsinhua Bookshop in Peking. While still an undergraduate I had come under the spell of the lovely old Pantun folk-songs, hence seeing this Chinese translation was like meeting an old friend. I immediately bought a copy and read it with delight, then put it first in a row of my favourite Indonesian works on the bookshelf, since this selection contains some of the earliest Indonesian literature translated into Chinese.

All these folk-songs have a strong national flavour. Their rhythms and imagery voice the thoughts and feelings of the people of ancient Indonesia. In some respects these songs are very similar to those in the *Shih Ching* or *Book of Songs*, our earliest anthology of songs in China. This is especially true of the poems describing the people's

Born in Bandung, Indonesia in 1927, Liang Li-chi graduated from the Oriental Languages Department of Peking University, where he now teaches. He has made a special study of Indonesian literature.

daily life and feelings and the love songs, which breathe sincerity and simple, healthy emotions.

Of course my interest in Indonesian literature is not confined to poetry. I enjoy reading novels, stories and plays by contemporary Indonesian writers, many of which have been translated into Chinese since the liberation. Examples are the novels *The Wrong Education*, *Surapati* and *Tambera*; the plays *Flower of the Restaurant*, *Awal and Mira*, *There Are Stars in Heaven* and *The Red Stone of Merapi Valley*; *The Poems of Harahap Bandaharo* and *The Poems of Sitor Situmorang*; collections of prose and verse like *The Waste Land* and selections of folk tales.

Chinese periodicals often publish fine Indonesian stories, plays and poems as well. Indonesian literature is popular in our country partly because of its high literary quality, partly because the Indonesian people have much in common with us in their resistance against imperialist and colonialist aggression through the centuries. These works reflecting the life and struggle of the Indonesian people speak a language we understand and express feelings we share, and this makes them very close to us.

Let me touch first on some Indonesian novels. *Tambera*, an early work by Utuy T. Sontani, tells how the Dutch colonialists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took control of the spice trade in the Banda islands by means of deception and wiles, then used force to occupy these islands. Sontani gives a penetrating exposure of the cruelty and avarice of the Dutch colonialists and the courageous struggle of the Banda people against aggression. The hero Kawista who resisted the colonialists is an unforgettable figure.

The hero of *Surapati* by Abdoel Moeis is the leader of the famous slave uprising in Java in the seventeenth century, who personifies the staunch indomitable spirit of the Indonesian nation.

Another celebrated novel by Abdoel Moeis, *The Wrong Education*, describes the tragedy of two young people of different races and the suffering caused by the enslavement of Indonesia by the Dutch early in the twentieth century. The chief character Hanafi falls in love with a girl of French and Indonesian parentage named Corrie, who mingles freely with the Dutch. Their marriage is condemned by colonial society with its racial discrimination. But in order to win Corrie, Hanafi turns his back on his own people, abandoning his family to become naturalized as a European. His end is inevitably tragic. This character is an object-lesson in the insidious nature of colonial

education which denationalized the innocent people and turned them into slaves. Hanafi's betrayal of his nation and his adulation of the West result from the so-called civilized education of the West. Moeis shows a profound insight into the evolution of such characters, and through skilful depiction of Hanafi's talk and behaviour reveals the ugly comprador mentality. This helps us to understand why after gaining independence the Indonesian people have made such determined efforts to wipe out all the poison of colonialism and imperialism in the sphere of education and culture.

The twenties of this century saw the great upsurge of the Indonesian struggle for national liberation which reached its climax in the people's revolution of 1926. During those stirring years the Indonesian people surged forward on a high tide of revolutionary fervour and did countless heroic deeds. *The Torch of* 1926 is a collection of stories about this period. The first, *Sabotage* by A.A. Zubir, was published in the Chinese monthly *World Literature* No. 1, 1963. Zubir is a progressive writer of distinction, several of whose stories have been translated into Chinese. *Sabotage* takes the form of reminiscences to describe the early underground struggle of the Indonesian Communists against the background of the 1926 revolution. In secret and under most difficult conditions, Party members organize the people to set fire to the warehouses and mansions of the Dutch colonialists who are sucking their blood.

Many stories about the August Revolution of 1945 have been translated into Chinese, and two which aroused much interest are Bachtiar Siagian's *The Pension* and Sobron Aidit's *Basimah*. In *The Pension* the old engine-driver Kasio, who has worked for twenty-five years for the Dutch, heroically gives his life for national independence. Old Kasio has been exploited all his life by the colonialists. At first his mind is set only on getting a pension for his old age, but after the revolution starts he gives this up to fight for the independence and freedom of his country. This old man exemplifies the nobility of ordinary Indonesian workers. *Basimah* is the story of a poor widow who sells cakes as a blind for her fearless activities in the underground. By brilliant organization and intelligence work she helps the guerrillas to blow up the Dutch barracks and munition dump, laying down her own life for the revolution. This deeply moving story reveals the writer's admiration and love for the revolutionary martyrs, ordinary working men and women

whose courageous fight has written such a heroic page in the annals of the national liberation movement.

After the establishment in 1950 of Lekra, the People's Cultural Association, the progressive writers of Indonesia raised even higher the revolutionary banner of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism. Guided by the directive "all art for the people," they speedily reflected in their writings the people's revolutionary struggle, life and aspirations, thereby helping the cause of unity and struggle. When the Indonesian people launched their mighty campaign to recover West Irian, Chinese readers were particularly interested in Agam Wispi's story *The Ships for West Irian* and S. W. Kuntjahjo's *Time for the Take-over*. The former describes how Indonesian sailors heroically seized enemy ships, the latter a sharp struggle in which Indonesian workers took over Dutch enterprises.

In February 1958, the imperialists instigated a counter-revolutionary armed rebellion in central Sumatra and north Sulawesi, in the course of which many Communists and revolutionaries were put in concentration camps and murdered. But at once the whole country waged a great fight against the counter-revolution. The Communist Party and the people of Indonesia fought back fearlessly against the fascist terror and made a tremendous contribution to the suppression of the rebellion. A. A. Zubir's story *The Party Vow* and Bachtiar Siagian's play *The Red Stone of Merapi Valley* both reflect and praise this heroic struggle. Zubir relates how a Communist who is giving his life for the cause writes a vow to the Party and the people on a handkerchief and urges his wife to carry on the struggle. Siagian presents a Communist, Mawardi, who dies a hero's death in the concentration camp in order to help his fellow prisoners to escape.

A people steeled in revolutionary struggles are not afraid of persecution and nothing can undermine their resolution. They will inevitably win victory at last. Since we know this from our own experience in China, we can well understand the spirit of these works.

The short story *Inem* by the celebrated Pramoedya Ananta Toer describes life in a small Indonesian town under the Dutch and reflects the sufferings of a girl under the feudal marriage system. This story has evoked a warm response in China.

The modern revolutionary poems of Indonesia are also loved in China. D. N. Aidit's *The Only Road* and *Coming of Age* make in-

spiring reading, for they show the revolutionary spirit and heroism of the Indonesian working class and the strong determination "braving tempests, lulled not by the breeze." Njoto's *Indonesia* and *China* are a superlative synthesis of proletarian internationalism and patriotism; and the profound content and brilliant artistic form of these and others of his works leave a deep and lasting impression upon readers.

Harahap Bandaharo's well-known poems *Fallen in Battle* and *Not a Road Strewn with Flowers* have been broadcast by the Central People's Broadcasting Station in Peking. His polished, concise and vivid images are profoundly significant and evocative. The line "No one shall return, though death waits ahead" shows the invincible determination of the Indonesian people, their daring and self-sacrifice, which cannot fail to stir the reader. Many of Sitor Situmorang's poems, like *Dawn in Peking* and *The Bread of the Commune,* express the friendship of the Indonesian people for the Chinese people and are well known here. Situmorang voices his love for the Chinese people and his hatred for the imperialists and colonialists, pointing out that this is the firm basis of the friendship between our two peoples. Mutual understanding, mutual support and mutual striving for world peace on this basis will strengthen our peoples' friendship in the years to come.

Chronicle

Plays in National Minority Languages

Several fine plays in the Yi language were staged for the first time at a recent theatre festival in Liangshan Yi Autonomous *Chou,* Szechuan. Most popular among them were *Sick?* and *It Happened in the Hills,* both depicting life in the Yi countryside.

In the old days the Yi people, confined by the reactionary Chiang Kai-shek regime to the mountainous regions of the Bigger and Lesser Liangshan Ranges, led a primitive existence. Since liberation, with the help of the people's government they have developed production, set up a national autonomous area, created their own written language, and published their own literary works. The staging of plays in the Yi language is another step forward in their cultural development.

Other minority peoples have also written and staged plays in their own languages. The Uighurs, Tibetans and Mongolians have been particularly successful in this respect. In order to develop their own drama, they send their actors and actresses, directors and stage designers to study in drama and film institutes in Peking and Shanghai. With the enthusiastic help of Han experts, a good number of first-rate theatrical artists have already been trained. Several of them have turned out in their own languages plays which are close to the lives of the minority peoples. The Tibetan drama *Forbidden the Right to Be Born,* performed in Peking not long ago, and the Uighur play *Red Flag in the Wind,* staged during a drama festival of the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region, are both of a high artistic level.

A Poetry Recital in Support of Viet-nam

The news of the U.S. attack on north Viet-nam aroused great indignation among Chinese writers and artists. In the middle of August, Peking poets, actors, actresses and musicians gathered in the Concert Hall of Chungshan Park where they voiced their anger in poetry protesting the U.S. aggression and expressing support of the Vietnamese people. More than 2,000 literary and art workers participated.

Chang Kuang-nien, well-known poet, made the opening speech. "Revolutionary anger produces revolutionary poetry and songs," he pointed out. "We are here because we have a deep class love for the Vietnamese people and class hatred for the U.S. invaders." After the speech he recited a poem he had just composed. Others also recited poems of their own making. These included *A Warning to the Invaders* by Kuo Mo-jo, *Braving Fiery Sun and Torrential Rain* by Yuan Shui-po, *Victory Is with Us* by Ho Ching-chih, *Well Fought, a Smashing Blow* by Wei Chuan-tung and *To Our Vietnamese Brothers* by Li Chi.

Many musicians presented new songs such as *Liberate the South, Hail Viet-nam's Retaliation Against the Aggressors, Well Done* and *We Support You, People of Viet-nam.* Four poems by Vietnamese poets To Huu, Thanh Hai, Xuan Dieu and Hoang Trung Thong, reflecting the Vietnamese people's struggle against U.S. imperialism, were also recited as well.

Also present were Hoai Thanh, Vietnamese writer and vice-director of the Vietnamese Academy of Literature, and Vietnamese poet Pham Nang Hong. Hoai Thanh addressed the meeting.

P.L.A. Photos

The 1964 photography exhibition of the Chinese People's Liberation Army displayed 238 pictures taken by more than 120 professional and amateur photographers, all members of the P.L.A. The pictures are scenes of P.L.A. life. Some of them, though simple in composition, are quite impressive. *Cook on the High Seas,* for instance, shows a young sailor on deck grinding beans for beancurd. Behind him the sun shines brightly on the sea. As he grinds he gazes smilingly at the water, obviously enjoying his work. Other pictures such as *Pulling in the Net Together,* reflect the close relationship between army-

men and civilians while *Patrols Along the Frontiers, Days and Nights on the Coastal Front, Our Territorial Waters Are Sacred* show the soldiers and sailors on duty. Many of the exhibits are not only rich in content but are fine works of art.

"The Flames of Nghe-Tinh"

The Song and Dance Ensemble of the Viet-nam People's Army recently toured China with *The Flames of Nghe-Tinh,* a revolutionary dance-drama. It tells of Nga, a peasant woman, and her family who were oppressed by a feudal landlord and a French capitalist, and reflects the revolutionary struggle of the people in Nghe-Tinh from 1930 to 1931 under the leadership of the Communist Party of Indo-China (predecessor of the Viet-nam Workers' Party). The drama portrays many heroic characters, such as young Nga and her worker husband Quy, both Communists. Fearlessly they lead the masses to fight and defeat enemies armed to their teeth. The music combines folk instruments with modern orchestration. Some of the choreography is based on the drum dance and other folk dances popular in the northern part of the country.

The Neo Lao Haksat Art Troupe

In August the Neo Lao Haksat Art Troupe came to China from Laos on the invitation of the China-Laotian Friendship Association. It toured the country for two months. Growing up in the midst of the Laotian people's revolutionary struggle, the troupe is quite young, the eldest of the 51 members is only 19. They perform regularly at the front as well as in the villages, where they work side by side with the peasants. They also collect and adapt traditional folk items.

The songs they sang on their Chinese tour are strongly militant. The mixed chorus *Fight to Defend Peace* and *Fighters Are Not Afraid of Any Hardship,* the male chorus *Oppose U.S. Imperialist Aggression Against Laos* and the female chorus *Girls Love Valiant Fighters* all express the Laotian people's determination to resist U.S. imperialist aggression. These songs pay tribute to the heroic spirit of the Neo Lao Haksat army and the close relationship between the army and the people. The troupe also sang many Laotian songs rich in folk flavour.

Their dances made a strong impression on the audience. In *Red Lantern* nine girls are shown struggling through the wind and rain. With a sudden change in the music, a tall woman appears, holding high a big red lantern, symbolizing the leadership of the Neo Lao Haksat, and leads the nine girls from darkness to light. *The Shield* is a national dance with a long tradition. Six young fighters in spirited movements bring out forcefully the courage of the Laotian people. *Dance of the Laosoongs* was performed by six young men with reed pipes and six girls with kerchiefs. Their lively steps show the people's joy as they celebrate their liberation. *The Laotian-Chinese Friendship Dance*, expressive of the wish that the friendship between our two countries be everlasting, is based on a folk dance popular among the Laotian people. It was performed by 12 girls with all the grace and subtle charm associated with Eastern dances.

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